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VOL. 2039.

MY LORD AND MY LADY BY MRS. FORRESTER

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. 1.

LEIPZIG: BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ.

PARIS: C. REINWALD, 15, RUE DES SAINTS PÈRES.

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By the same Author,

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BY

MRS. FORRESTER,

AUTHOR OF "VIVA," "ROY AND VIOLA," ETC.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1882.

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MY LORD AND MY LADY.

CHAPTER I.

"You really think he will?"

"I feel quite sure of it."

"And what shall you say?"

"Mamma!!!"

There is infinite expression in the intonation of that single word. It implies, "Can you doubt me? Am I in possession of my senses? Is there any answer possible but one?"

The mother gazes at her lovely daughter with a look of fondest affection; of deepest admiration.

"Of course, my darling. But,"—with faint hesitation—"there is just this to think of—might you not do better?"

The girl shakes her head. It is a beautifully shaped little head, which genius has forborne to mar by any bumps or excrescences: she has not even indicated the self-esteem that Dorothea St. George has so large a share of.

"That is the way," she answers, with a pretty air of wisdom, "by which so many girls spoil their chances; waiting for something better. It is much wiser, when you get a good offer, to close with it at once. Just think how many pretty girls we know, of three or four and twenty, who have waited, and are not in the least likely to marry anyone worth having now. You see, Mamma dear, I shall be twenty next month!"

"Yes," says Mrs. St. George, with a little sigh. "But Lord Belhaven is plain and *gauche*, and not so very rich, after all. And"—looking at her daughter with the intense admiration that she has never thought it wise or prudent to disguise—"you might marry *anyone*."

"He has twelve thousand a year," returns Dorothea, "and he is not deformed, nor unsightly in any way."

"But, dearest child," (a trifle anxiously), "do you care for him at all?"

"No," says beautiful Dorothea, making a little *moue*, "there is nothing in him to care about. One cannot have everything!"

Mrs. St. George sighs. She thinks her lovely darling ought to marry a Duke with a thousand pounds a day, and the handsomest person in England. Even then it would be His Grace who would benefit by the alliance.

"Tell me again," she says, "what makes you think that he intends to propose to you?"

"All the first part of the evening," relates Dorothea, "he had been standing about in corners of the room, staring at me, until I thought his eyes would have started out of his head, and looking quite fierce and jealous every time I waltzed with anyone. I wondered why he did not speak to me; then, just the last waltz before we left for Lady Dash's, he came up, and asked me for it. I was engaged to poor Charlie, and I knew Lord Belhaven couldn't dance an atom, but I said 'Yes,' of course, and made a sign to Charlie, who good-naturedly went off, though he looked rather glum about it. I went through an awful moment, flying round the room with his lordship. He ground my toes to a jelly; he tore a yard off my skirt, and that mercifully gave me an excuse for stopping to get it pinned up. After that, I said I was hot, and we went into the conservatory. No one else was there, and, suddenly, he caught hold of my hand, and began to stutter and tremble, and talk incoherently, when you, my poor, dear, innocent mother, came round the corner to carry me off. But, as he took me downstairs, he whispered,

"'Shall you be at home at four o'clock to-morrow?' and I said, 'Yes.' It's a great bore, of course, because I should much rather have been driving down to Hurlingham on Sir Henry's coach, but still,

it is just as well to get it over, and, if he had seen me driving with another man, he might have changed his mind. I am afraid," (yawning), "he is rather jealous. It will be very disagreeable if he is."

Mrs. St. George looks at the gilt clock on the chimney-piece.

"It is ten minutes to four now," she says. "What do you think, my love? Had I better be in the room when he comes?"

"No," answers Dorothea; "I think not. You see, it is always so awkward to find an excuse for leaving people together. But, if, after a minute or two, he has not plunged into his proposal, I shall ring the bell, and tell James to let you know he is here."

"You don't think it will look too pointed, his finding you alone?"

"Oh, dear no. If he has really come to propose, he will be only too thankful, and won't stop to think about anything else. Perhaps, too, the very hint of sending for you will help him to the point."

The clock marks five minutes to the hour when, with startling suddenness, the door is burst open, and a young girl, her eyes streaming, her hair dishevelled, rushes in like an avalanche, a tornado, and flings herself on the ground at Mrs. St. George's feet.

A slight frown ruffles beautiful Dorothea's smooth brow; her face expresses a great deal more of dis-

gust than sympathy. The same look, accentuated and intensified, is reflected in her mother's countenance.

"What is it now, Cilla?" she asks, impatiently, without the slightest attempt to soothe the child's quivering frame, or stanch her streaming tears.

"Oh, Mamma, I cannot bear it. I cannot. I cannot!" Cilla gasps out.

At this instant the front-door bell rings sharply.

"It is Lord Belhaven!" cries Dorothea, starting up with an impetuosity quite unusual to her. "Mamma, get her away! She will spoil everything!"

"Cilla! here is a visitor. Do you hear! Are you not ashamed of yourself?" cries Mrs. St. George, and, half leading, half dragging her sobbing daughter, she hurries out of the room.

Dorothea's nerves are fluttering from this little scene when his lordship is announced; but, like a skilful general, she sees in a moment how the situation may be turned to advantage.

"We were just in the midst of a scene," she says, in her soft, pretty way.

"Of a scene?" echoes Lord Belhaven inquiringly.

"Yes. Mamma and I were sitting here together —we were expecting you, you know, because you said you should call to-day."

"Yes!" he utters, eagerly, devouring her with his eyes; his love and passion growing every moment

that he looks at her. Is there any chance of making this exquisite creature his? He is prepared to give all he has for her. He would sacrifice twenty years of his life, could such a bargain be made. I am afraid to think what proposals from Mephisto he might not entertain if the gentleman in scarlet stood at his elbow, and whispered in his ear.

"My poor little sister came flying in," continues Dorothea, putting on a sympathetic air and tone that she had been far from adopting towards the sufferer. "She is very emotional, poor dear child, and she has dreadful fits of crying, and she was in the midst of one of them. Did you hear her as you came up the stairs?"

"No," returns Lord Belhaven; "what was the matter with her?"

"I am not quite sure. Probably it was some dispute with her governess. They don't get on very well."

Lord Belhaven has a kind heart, but, at this moment, it is beating with an emotion so much stronger than that of pity, that the woes of a child in the school-room fail to stir it. Indeed, he only thinks what an affectionate, sympathetic angel Dorothea is to be moved by her sister's imaginary woes.

His heart is throbbing like a hammer upon an anvil; his gray eyes are lighted by an eager fire—he advances a step towards her.

Dorothea's soul waxes faint within her; she feels

like the victim of a wild beast about to spring—she would as lief be sitting in a dentist's chair with the pincers holding one of those dainty pearls, her teeth. If men only knew the agony they inflict by embracing a woman who does not love them! But no doubt they always imagine, as Lord Belhaven does at this moment, that they cannot be repulsive to the being who so powerfully magnetises them.

But Dorothea is as full of courage as the Spartan boy.

"What an angel you are!" cries Lord Belhaven, and then, coming quite close till his eager lips nearly touch hers—"Oh, if you knew how I love you!"

Dorothea would rather not know by practical demonstration—indeed she would like to push him from her with all her might, but she only averts her face as much as maiden modesty demands and trembles a little.

"I am a plain, rough fellow," cries Lord Belhaven with honest passion, "but I love you with all my soul. I am not worthy of you—the loveliest creature God ever made. But tell me that you don't hate me—give me a little atom of hope to live on."

"Oh, Lord Belhaven!" and Dorothea droops her lovely head. But he holds her fast, and presses that kiss to her sweet red lips which is fraught with such rapture to himself, such intolerable disgust to her. Then she withdraws herself from him, not in anger,

but with maidenly reserve. She is not going to have any more teeth out, at all events for the present.

"How happy you make me!" utters Lord Belhaven, whilst his deep voice falters. "I hardly feel as though I were awake. If you knew the agony of doubt and fear that I have gone through since I left you last night!"

"Why should you have feared?" says Dorothea in her pretty, caressing tone, just giving him a little look, and then dropping her eyes.

"Why!" he echoes. "Because you are so sweet, so beautiful, so angelic. Upon my soul," looking at her with ardent eyes, "I don't think you know what you are yourself."

Lord Belhaven need entertain no fears upon this account—few women are more thoroughly aware of their charms than Miss St. George.

"Oh," she answers, with bewitching modesty, and with her own silvery little laugh, "I am a very ordinary young person, only you are so kind as to think more of me than I deserve."

"Kind!" and he makes a gesture that Dorothea has to repel by putting up her two dainty hands to protect her face. No more teeth out to-day, thank you, at all events, until the proposal has been made, and accepted in due form. But she is not by one half so eager to ratify the bond as he is.

"May I—dare I believe that you will be mine—my very own?" he cries, impetuously.

She hesitates.

"I could never—never do anything without first being sure of my dear mother's wishes," she murmurs. "You know,"—sweetly—"Mamma and I are all in all to each other."

Did the man ever breathe, who, being worthily in love with a woman, did not think ten thousand times more of her for showing filial love and tenderness!

"Of course," he cries with emphasis. "But"—anxiously—"your mother, I hope, does not dislike me; has not conceived any prejudice against me?"

"No, no, indeed!" answers Dorothea. "On the contrary."

"I can fancy," says the lover, taking one slim white hand in his, "that she would hate any man who wanted to rob her of you, but I hope not me more than another. May I see her?"

"I will ask her to come to you," and Dorothea rises.

Lord Belhaven puts a detaining arm round her.

"And if—if I succeed in persuading her to give you to me, may I believe that you will consent, too?"

"Yes," falls from the girl's lips, like a pearl.

Then the operation which makes him think of Heaven, and her of the dentist's chair, is repeated.

Dorothea trips down into the dining-room with her fair face flushed, and her lips red, like roses. It is not only her lover's kiss that has given them this bright carmine; all the way downstairs she has been rubbing them violently with her little frilled handkerchief, in her desire to get rid of the embrace.

"Well! my darling!" cries Mrs. St. George with intense eagerness.

Dorothea performs a graceful little war-dance on the faded Turkey-carpet; then she throws her arms round her mother's neck.

"His lordship awaits you, my dear. Go to him, fold him to your maternal breast, but do not sell your child too cheaply. Say that it will be a trial to part with me, etc., etc., and—but I need not tell you—you are sure to say the right thing."

"God bless you, my own darling child!" says the mother, with tears in her eyes.

Dorothea makes light of this blessing, but, under the same roof, there is a bleeding, passionate heart that thinks itself broken, to which those tender words would have been balm indeed. It was Cilla's. To her, however, they had not been spoken; she had been sharply chidden instead. Poor Cilla!

Dorothea throws herself into a chair and sighs. These emotions are very fatiguing. But she is going to be a Viscountess—blissful thought! If one could only be a Viscountess without the Viscount.

"I hope to Heaven," she says to herself, "that he will not always be wanting to demonstrate his affection in that dreadful way; it is really too sickening."

Then she rises, and gets the Peerage from the book-stand: not to study Lord Belhaven's antecedents; that she has done long ago, but to see what a Viscountess's coronet is like; to con over the "Precedency of Women," and to know before whom she will be able to walk out of a room.

"I wish he was an Earl," she thinks, shutting up the book. "But it's a pretty name. The Viscountess Belhaven. Yes, it will look extremely well. I don't think I could have done better—bar the man. He is a bore, but one can't have everything."

Presently Mrs. St. George returns. She is wiping her eyes and betraying a good deal more emotion than the lovely Dorothea has done.

"He is a kind, good creature," she says in a voice that is not very steady, "and he adores you. But who could help it?" and the doating mother looks into her child's face with a gaze expressive of the love, almost amounting to idolatry, which she feels for her.

"Has he said anything about settlements?" asks Dorothea.

"He gave me to understand that he should think nothing too much to give you or to do for you. And now, darling, you must go back to him."

"Not without you, Mamma dear," cries the girl with a little flush—"you must come too."

"No, love; he would rather not have me, I am sure."

"But I would rather—*very much rather*," insists Dorothea. "Besides, you must say 'Bless you, my children!' in the proper, orthodox way. I suppose he won't stay very long. What a mercy that we are dining out to-night! Did you tell him?"

"My dearest child," says her mother anxiously, "I am afraid you do not care for him."

"Don't you trouble your dear head about that," replies Dorothea smiling. "Only promise me, *promise me* that you won't leave me alone with him again to-day."

"But he will think it so odd."

"Never mind—it will make him all the more in love. To-morrow," with a little groan, "I suppose he must spend the day here—lunch and dinner too. And Sunday—such a dreadful day. Oh, I know—I will take him to church to Margaret Street. They separate the sexes there, so I shall get rid of him for a little, and afterwards, we will go and sit in the Park. Pray Heaven it may be a fine day!"

Then mother and daughter ascend the stairs together.

Nothing could be prettier than the little tableau they make in the drawing-room. Mrs. St. George, with tears in her eyes—very genuine tears too—puts

Dorothea's hand into the Viscount's, and Dorothea blushes and trembles a little bit, and looks the incarnation of loveliness and modesty. If the notary and priest had been as conveniently handy as they are on the stage, what would not Lord Belhaven have given his betrothed, and what could he have refused the priest who made her his! But his lover's ardour is not to have full play—the mother remains on the scene in the most provoking manner. Poor woman! she is terribly embarrassed; she feels for Lord Belhaven, and wishes herself a thousand miles away, but she has promised Dorothea.

At last, in despair, he takes his hat and departs, after a wistful look at the lovely face which is his own yet not his own, and feeling, it is to be presumed, very much as Tantalus felt with the delicious fruit hanging just out of his reach.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaims Dorothea, with unfeigned piety, as the door closes upon him.

But as she goes to her dinner-party that evening, she has never felt happier; never looked more bewitching.

On her return home, there is a little packet awaiting her, and a great sheaf of beautiful white flowers.

She opens the packet hurriedly, presses the spring of the ring-case it contains, and then makes a little dissatisfied *moue*. Instead of the three rings she expected to find, there is only one in which are set a

large ruby and a large diamond, both heartshaped, surmounted by a crown of small brilliants.

It is a true enough symbol—the blood-red heart of the man who loves so much, and the cold, hard diamond, emblematic of Dorothea's, joined by a coronet.

Lord Belhaven, however, had no *arrière pensée*, and only chose the ring, thinking it less commonplace than three half hoops. He bought a magnificent diamond cross at the same time, which he means to present to his love in person to-morrow.

Dorothea, of course, does not know this, and thinks the ring rather mean. Mrs. St. George, seeing her pout, says consolingly,

"They are exquisite stones, Thea darling, and large."

"I hate trashy, sentimental ideas," returns Dorothea, more crossly than she is wont to speak. "And," giving a pettish push to the flowers, "I hate loose flowers. They are such a trouble to arrange."

"Cilla will like to do them," says her mother, soothingly. "And she has great taste."

Dorothea retires to bed rather put out. Still she is going to be a Viscountess.

CHAPTER II.

At lunch next day Lord Belhaven saw Cilla for the first time.

She always lunched in the dining-room on Sundays. So did Fräulein Steinman, her governess; but fortunately to-day she had gone to visit some German friends. On other days they had also the privilege of lunching with Mrs. St. George and Dorothea if there was no company. When there was, they were relegated to the stuffy third room, where Cilla's education was laboriously and agonisingly carried on, and got their dinner in a very uncertain and uncomfortable manner.

Lord Belhaven, wrapt up as he was in Dorothea; in admiration and contemplation of her manifold charms, had yet time to look at Cilla, and to be somewhat exercised in his mind about her. She had the most wonderful eyes he had ever seen—she was totally unlike either mother or sister, and she looked distinctly unhappy.

What was there in those eyes? They seemed to him, putting it in a fanciful manner, like the eyes of a soul—they were like lamps kindled by intelligence,

by passion, by grief—they were strangely beautiful and beautifully strange. They seemed not to belong by rights to a material body, but to have ken of something spiritual, more than mortal. Lord Belhaven's mind was not an ordinary one—it was a strange mixture of romance, poetic ideas and feeling, happily leavened with a strong admixture of common-sense and a tolerably sound judgment. He was an enthusiast about beauty; it blinded him, or rather made him wilfully blind to imperfection in the creature who possessed it.

He looked from Dorothea to Cilla, and from Cilla back again to Dorothea, and was puzzled. One sister was the incarnation of sensuous beauty; the other, as it seemed to him, of romance, poetry, passion. But why was she unhappy? With a mother who seemed the kindest soul upon earth; a sister who was softness, gentleness, sweetness itself: how could she be unhappy? "Can she be in love? She looks such a child, barely sixteen, but she may be precocious," he says to himself.

He has spoken to her once or twice; she has raised her large eyes to his; a faint blush has passed over her pale face; she has answered him by a monosyllable.

Lunch is over; he is permitted to enjoy the society of his exquisite love alone, and he forgets Cilla as though he had never seen her. He presents his offering, and is allowed to take out its value in

almost as many kisses as there are stones in the jewel. I fear, in his present humour, this reckless being would mortgage every stick of his property, if he might go on buying rapture at the same price. But Dorothea, who is so sweet and gentle, can be very firm on occasion, and her maidenly modesty will not permit of too much ardour or freedom on the part of even an affianced lover.

It is a warm afternoon. Dorothea does not feel like church; she is half-reclined in a delicious chair. The windows are open, the sunblinds down; and her lover is conversing, in the most interesting manner, about his belongings, and consulting her as to *their* future plans and movements. The idea of Margaret Street is abandoned. Between four and five they will go into the Park and sit under the trees, on that acre or two of land which fashion at this moment patronises on Sunday afternoons.

The engagement has not yet been made public: therefore it would be unconventional for the lovers to appear without a chaperon, and Mrs. St. George, though perfectly willing to sacrifice herself to her daughter, thinks that, under the circumstances, a party of three will be eminently undesirable. She therefore contemplates taking her younger daughter, to bear her company. The mere proposal sends Cilla into a seventh heaven: Cilla, who has so passionate a longing after amusement and pleasure, and who is never allowed to participate in the

gaieties of mother and sister. The only question is, whether this Cinderella can be made presentable enough not to disgrace them; for, though poor Cilla loves fine raiment, and has the true feminine instinct of desiring to make the best of herself, Mrs. St. George has never thought it necessary to expend money, nor to exercise taste in her younger daughter's apparel. Cilla has been compelled to wear great, ugly, shady hats, which have hidden her beautiful low brow and eyes. What did it matter how she looked! So infatuated was Mrs. St. George on the subject of her elder daughter's beauty, that she hardly considered any other girl or woman good-looking.

It was an old-established, deeply-rooted idea in her mind that Cilla was plain, and must be made clever and accomplished, if she was ever to attract anyone. Mrs. St. George positively shuddered at the thought that, after having been accustomed to go into the world with her lovely Dorothea, she would have to present Cilla to its criticism.

"What can you put on? Have you *anything* decent, Cilla?" inquires Mrs. St. George in rather an injured tone, as she and her younger daughter sit, after luncheon, in the dining-room, whilst the lovers are supposed to be in amorous *tête-à-tête* upstairs.

"Go and fetch your hat, that I may look at it," continues the mother.

"It is hideous;" she pronounces discontentedly, when the girl returns with it, ignoring the fact that she bought it herself in the Buckingham Palace Road, for no other reason than because it was cheap. "Really, I cannot be seen with you in that thing!"

Cilla's lip quivers. She is none the more reconciled to disappointment because it is so frequently her lot, and the idea of this walk in the Park amongst the fashionable throng has been like a glimpse of the roses of the seventh heaven to her longing thoughts.

"Oh, Mamma, may I not go?"

"Well, my dear, I suppose there is nothing to cry about if you do not," rejoins Mrs. St. George with that coldness which her younger daughter's sensitiveness always inspires in her.

Cilla turns hastily away ere those lovely, troublesome fountains send forth the drops that are always so near the surface.

Mrs. St. George is reflecting. Her thoughts have not much reference to Cilla's pleasure or disappointment.

"It will be a great bore to have to sit and look the other way, and I shall be dreadfully *de trop*, but to be seen with Cilla in that hat——"

Then she has an inspiration.

"Go and get the little black bonnet which Thea wears to go shopping in—put it on as nicely as you can, and come to me," she says.

Cilla flies to obey.

When she re-enters the room a few minutes later, there is a new light in her eyes; a little smile on her lips. Her mother positively stares: she has never dreamed that her ugly duckling could have so much pretension to swandom as this.

She smiles.

"When you come out, you must always wear a bonnet," she says pleasantly. Then she goes towards Cilla and gives her a kiss.

At this sudden show of affection, the fountains are set in motion again; so sensitive, so swift to receive impressions is the girl's nature, the tears are only restrained by Mrs. St. George saying tartly,

"Now, Cilla, if you are so absurd, you shall not go."

And Cilla, with a mighty effort, controls her *absurdity*.

A pair of long pearl-grey gloves, a lace fichu, a parasol, all the property of Dorothea, are found for the younger sister, and, when the party issues from the door, the mother, happily, does not feel any pang of shame at being seen with Cilla.

It is a lovely summer afternoon—sitting under that leafy canopy through which the sun filters, watching the brilliant crowd that boasts so many pretty, well-dressed women, so many good-looking men, Cilla is in a sort of ecstacy. Oh, happy people, she thinks, who live for ever in this delicious vortex!

She would not have believed that any of them could be bored or discontented.

Many of the men who pass look at her; some turn to look again, and a glow of rapture goes to her heart in which the desire for love, admiration, pleasure, are the all-absorbing passions.

A few young men approach Mrs. St. George and Dorothea, and stay to talk for some moments, but Lord Belhaven's air of proprietorship, his semi-scowl at the intruders, soon drives them away. One or two glance inquiringly at Cilla, but Mrs. St. George does not introduce her to them. It is only when a fine-looking, pleasant-mannered man who stops before them asks point-blank whether Cilla is another daughter, that the mother thinks fit to present her.

"Yes," she says, smiling, "this is my younger girl; she is still in the school-room."

Colonel Lynn pounces upon a chair which a man is just vacating, and brings it to the other side of Cilla.

He begins to talk to her. For a moment or two she blushes, trembles, falters a little as she answers his remarks, and then a feeling creeps over her as though she has known him all her life; her embarrassment dies away—she is supremely pleased and happy.

An elderly admirer of Mrs. St. George joins the group, and monopolises her attention. Colonel Lynn, who is a great favourite in society; who is honoured

by the acquaintance of all the beauties, finds considerable pleasure in talking to this young girl. The object of his life, at the present moment, is to win her eyes to his; those strange, lovely eyes that are like a well which reflects the vault of Heaven, and which innocently tell a thousand tales to a man who is well versed in heart-lore. Naturally, he does most of the talking. He gives her terse, amusing little biographies of the people worth notice around them: no one has a cleverer knack of it than this popular Guardsman; he makes some of his fair friends die of laughing with his stories. But to Cilla he gives the most Bowdlerised version of everything. He has a mighty regard, like all brave men, for innocence.

"Who is that lady?" Cilla inquires, as an elegant-looking woman, accompanied by a cavalier on either side, passes close to them.

The lady, who excites Cilla's curiosity, gives a graceful little nod to Colonel Lynn, and the tall man on her right throws him a "How are you?"

The Colonel doffs his hat to the lady, and responds, "How are you, Duke?" to her companion.

"That is one of the most charming women in London," he says in answer to Cilla. "Mrs. Beauclerc, and the man this side is Duke Vereker, Marmaduke Vereker: a capital, good fellow. He is rolling in money, and he gives the pleasantest parties in the

world. Now, tell me, how does Mrs. Beauclerc strike you? Do you think her handsome?"

"Not exactly handsome," Cilla answers frankly, her shyness having quite worn off by this time, "but such a nice face. And she looks such a lady! When you said, 'How are you, Duke?' I thought she was his wife, perhaps, and a Duchess."

Colonel Lynn laughs.

"Vereker declares that his name is the burden of his life. Servants and people who hear him called Duke, at once address him as 'your grace.'"

"Is he *Mr.* Vereker?"

"Yes, simply Mr. Vereker. The man on the other side is her husband, Captain Beauclerc."

What a history could Colonel Lynn tell to some fair listeners of what the world has said about this trio, but he has no further biographical notice to give of them to the pure-eyed maiden beside him.

Cilla follows them with her eyes, not dreaming how great a part two out of the three are destined to play in her life.

Meantime, conversation between the lovers begins to flag. Lord Belhaven does not possess the invaluable gift of small-talk, and Dorothea takes not the faintest interest in those deeper subjects, of which he is willing and able to talk. He cannot make love to her before a thousand eyes, being naturally shy, and so the pauses in their dialogue

become longer and more frequent. Suddenly he remembers Cilla.

"What is your sister's name?" he asks.

"Cilla."

"But her real name? That is only an abbreviation, I suppose?"

"Lucilla; but we never call her anything except Cilla."

"What marvellous eyes she has! In a year or two she will be beautiful."

"Cilla beautiful!" and Dorothea turns and looks at her lover as though a sudden doubt of his sanity crossed her brain. "My dear Lord Belhaven!"

"Don't call me Lord Belhaven," he utters with tender reproach.

"What shall I call you then?" she asks in her pretty, caressing voice.

"Granville."

"Well then," shyly and daintily, "my dear Granville. Cilla beautiful!"

"She will never, of course, be a tenth part as lovely as you," murmurs his lordship tenderly, "but she will have a beauty of her own. You will see that, in a year or two, men will be madly in love with her."

Dorothea is irritated. She is not jealous. Can the orchid be jealous of the violet?

"But, you know," she says with an almost imperceptible sharpness of tone, "we consider Cilla a

fright. That is why we are making her clever—one must be something now-a-days; either an heiress, or pretty, or clever. Poor dear Mamma is trembling already at the thought of bringing her out."

"I can easily understand," murmurs Lord Belhaven, "that living with anyone so lovely as you would make a person very critical about beauty."

For the moment Dorothea feels happier about her lover's mental condition. He, however, continues.

"But a fright! Why, such eyes as hers would redeem any face from plainness."

"Do you admire them?" says Dorothea coldly. "They are strange, uncomfortable eyes, I think; they are not like anyone else's. They are always reproaching, devouring, or annihilating one."

"Why does she look so unhappy?"

"Oh, because she is perverse. She hates lessons, and she detests her governess, and there are scenes, and quarrels, and tears all day long."

"But why, in the name of Heaven," cries Lord Belhaven, "does your mother keep a governess whom your sister hates? Nothing in this world could be so hurtful for a sensitive girl of that age, as to have bad feelings continually called into play. Why, it may be the ruin of her!"

"It would be all the same whoever it was," returns Dorothea nonchalantly; "she has one of those tiresome, uncomfortable dispositions. And

Fräulein Steinman is so clever, we could never get anyone else like her."

"What do you call a tiresome, uncomfortable nature?" asks Lord Belhaven.

Dorothea looks perplexed for a moment.

"It is so difficult to put it into words," she says. "I mean a nature that is always in extremes. Now, with Cilla, you never know how she will take anything. You may make a remark, not meaning anything unkind, and she will be in a flood of tears in a moment, and then, perhaps, just when one is dressed, she will want to rush at one, and smother one with kisses, and, if you ask her ever so gently not to be violent or demonstrative, she will look at you with those dreadful eyes of hers as though you were the most cruel, hard-hearted wretch alive."

Lord Belhaven leans back in his chair and sighs. He knows what the hunger of the heart is, and he is wondering whether this beautiful creature beside him will ever satisfy it.

"A sensitive nature is a great scourge to its possessor," he says aloud.

Dorothea is on the point of replying, "It is a great bore for everybody else," but she suddenly remembers who her auditor is, and in what relation she stands towards him, and replies sweetly, "Yes," and gives a little fluttering sigh, followed by a successfully stifled yawn.

Passion, sentiment, romance! All these things

are a bore in Dorothea's eyes. To skim, like a butterfly, through the balmy air, brushing with light wing the surface of the gay-hued flowers, symbols of pleasure, ease, luxury, that is the only *rôle* she cares to play in life. Butterflies are made to delight the eye; not to give honey.

Dorothea bends a little forward, to see more of a toilette which has just passed, and, in doing so, catches sight of Colonel Lynn, talking with an interested air to Cilla, and looking at her with eyes in which approbation is clearly written.

"What a mercy for poor Mamma if she should turn out decently after all!" she thinks. "Certainly I never dreamed she could look so well—it is that bonnet."

The crowd is thinning; it is no longer necessary to make dashes and struggles for chairs—there are half-dozens together vacant. Generally speaking, Dorothea enjoys these Sunday afternoons in the Park; she is wont to be the centre of an admiring circle, but Lord Belhaven's air of proprietorship has scared other men away to-day, and the only satisfaction to Dorothea is to reflect that she is going to be a Viscountess, and that the world will soon know it—it will already have made a shrewd guess on the subject, no doubt. The beauty finds her lover dull company indeed; but there is consolation in the thought that when he is her husband she will not be obliged to take all this trouble to make con-

versation for him, and, if things turn out well, perhaps she won't have very much of his society at all.

Lord Belhaven is to dine with the family of St. George. At the Park gates he leaves them to go to his rooms to dress, and Colonel Lynn joins Dorothea.

"Well, my lady," he says gaily, "I suppose it will not be indiscreet to congratulate you."

Dorothea gives him one of her sweet little smiles.

"Thanks," she murmurs.

"Happy Belhaven! By Jove! he is the luckiest fellow in all England! I wish I were he."

"You are much nicer as you are," returns Dorothea with a *naïveté* not altogether unstudied.

"But I am not going to marry you," says the Colonel plaintively. "Don't ask me to the wedding —I shall not come."

Then she smiles and he smiles, and as their ways diverge here, they shake hands and part.

He bids Cilla good-bye last.

"I shall look forward with impatience to your coming out," he says, and the great, speaking eyes look into his with unfeigned gladness, and tell him that she takes his compliment *au grand sérieux*. And indeed she does, and repeats it rapturously to herself thousands of times, and it gives her new courage to face her daily martyrdom with Fräulein Steinman.

"My own darling!" whispers Lord Belhaven in a voice full of passionate tenderness to his betrothed that evening, "if you knew how divinely happy you have made me!"

"If you knew how intensely you are boring me!" thinks Dorothea, but she smiles sweetly at him.

When the clock strikes the half hour after ten, he says reluctantly,

"I suppose I ought to be going."

But he looks almost pleadingly at her, hoping she will give him a little more grace.

"I am afraid poor dear Mamma is rather tired," replies Dorothea. "We must think of her, must we not? Dear, darling mother! she is so good and so unselfish."

Lord Belhaven is amongst the very few of his sex who can lay claim to the virtue just mentioned. Even as she speaks, he rises and prepares to go.

"My sweet love," he says, bending over her, "tell me that you do care a little bit for me. I am not worthy of it, I know. I am a plain, awkward fellow, but," with a humility that is almost touching, "Titania liked Bottom, or thought she did for the time."

Dorothea is not untruthful by nature, but there are cases when falsehood is a positive, almost indeed a sacred, duty.

"Of course I care for you," she says, valiantly repressing the irritation and disgust she feels at the imprisonment in which he is holding her.

Parting may be "sweet sorrow" to his lordship, but it is an intense relief to Dorothea.

"Thank Heaven!" she cries with a mighty sigh, when the hall-door closes upon her Romeo, and she and her mother are alone in the dining-room. "Mamma, I must positively marry him soon, and get it over. This courtship will be the death of me. I never spent such a long day in my life—not even a wet day at the seaside. It has been forty-eight hours long."

"My poor darling!" ejaculates her mother, looking at this Virgin Martyr with the deepest commiseration.

"Yes," says Dorothea, "he is in a great hurry to be married, and it will be a great comfort to get it over. Let me see! This is the second week in June. If he presses it very much, we might be married the last week in July, and we could go abroad for two or three weeks, and be up at his Scotch place the end of August. He must have a man or two there; he can't shoot all by himself! To-morrow afternoon he wishes to drive me out, and we are to go to the play in the evening; so, the first thing after breakfast, we'll go off and order my *lingerie*. I shall have the coronet on everything. I suppose one can trust to the one in 'Lodge.' So stupid; he never has it on his writing-paper. Ah! wait till I am Lady Belhaven."

"Would you order your trousseau quite so soon,

my love?" says Mrs. St. George, with a little hesitation. "Don't you think we had better find out first what he means to do about settlements?"

"Oh, that will be right enough," says Dorothea, with an air of conviction. "He would bestow his head on me, if he could. I shall give him a hint about *his* trousseau," laughingly. "How abominably he dresses! Really, it ought to be pinned on his back that he is a lord."

"It is very odd," remarks Mrs. St. George, "but I think that, as a rule, lords are very common-place looking men, particularly eldest sons."

"Never mind," says Dorothea, "everyone about whom it matters, knows who he is, and the rest don't count. But I certainly shall tell him about his hat. By the way, dear, talking of looks, how much better Cilla looked to-day than usual. I really have some hope that, by the time she comes out, she will be presentable."

"I never was more surprised in my life," answers Mrs. St. George. "And she talked quite nicely to Colonel Lynn, and he seemed amused with her."

"I shall do my best for her," remarks Dorothea magnificently. "But I am certain we shall never be able to trust her. Just when we have found a good match for her, she will be sure to fall in love with a man who has not a half-penny. Do you suppose," she continues with an air of conscious virtue, "that she will never be capable of doing what I am going

to do; to marry a man I don't care two straws about; who is, if anything, rather repulsive to me! I am afraid, dear, you have rather a rough time before you. How dreadful these sensational, untameable, romantic natures are. One might as well let Red Indians, Zulus, or wild beasts loose upon society. How did you ever come to have such a daughter, my poor, dear mother?"

"She is the image of her father," sighs Mrs. St. George. "Of course you don't remember very much about him. You were only six when he died."

"Why did you marry him?" asks Dorothea. "He wasn't rich, and I am sure, if he was like Cilla, he couldn't have been pleasant."

"It does not matter so much about a man being strange," answers her mother. "And you know, when I married him, he was heir presumptive to his horrid old uncle, who, at seventy, married his housekeeper, and had the audacity to have two children."

"The abandoned old wretch!" says Dorothea with an air of disgust. "Then, was Papa always blazing out, like a volcano?"

"Very often. But that was better than when he took a silent and reproachful fit. His eyes were like Cilla's, and he used to look at me in a way that made me feel the greatest wretch on earth without in the least knowing why. I shall never forget one day. He was very clever, you know, and

wrote poetry and that sort of thing. I hate poetry myself."

"So do I—loathe it," interrupts Dorothea.

"Well, it was one day after lunch—a very warm afternoon, and we were sitting out in the garden under the trees. Your poor father took a great roll of paper from his pocket and began to read. So, just for the sake of being civil, I asked what it was, and he told me it was his new poem, and offered to read me some of it. I always feel drowsy after lunch in warm weather, and the poetry had a very soothing effect, so I went off into the most beautiful sleep you can imagine. When I woke, he was gone, and I don't think he spoke to me for three days afterwards."

"Oh, Heaven!" cries Dorothea. "I hope and trust Belhaven doesn't write poetry. Now, dearest mother, do try to be a little earlier to-morrow, and directly, *directly* after breakfast, we will go to Jane Hemstitch's."

CHAPTER III.

Mrs. St. George would have felt excessively injured and indignant had anyone taxed her with cruelty to, or neglect of, her younger daughter. She believed that she was doing the best for her, and even making considerable sacrifices on her account. It would have been far pleasanter for Dorothea and herself if Cilla had been away at school—a governess in the house was a nuisance, but then, girls seldom learn anything at school, and most men have a rooted objection to girls' schools, and infinitely prefer that the wife they select should have been educated at home, and kept under the affectionate watchfulness of a mother's eye.

Years ago Mrs. St. George had settled in her own mind that Cilla's personal charms would be of but a poor order, and that mental ones must be carefully cultivated in her. When one has thoroughly made up one's mind on a subject, it takes a great deal to change it. Mrs. St. George's idea of beauty was fulfilled in her lovely Dorothea—regular features, a perfect skin, a rich shade of golden hair. Then Dorothea had a placid disposition and a temper not easily ruffled, both which good things she inherited from her mother, whom she greatly resembled. The

display of any violent emotion was distasteful and repugnant to both—they had as great a horror of a "scene" as any man. They respected Cilla's undoubted talent—they thankfully admitted that she was clever; but they thought her April-like disposition odious, and regarded her as a nuisance. They could see no beauty in the eyes that were destined later to call forth so much admiration from the other sex, nor were they the least conscious of the native grace, elegance, refinement, which the smallest cultivation would have brought to perfection in her. The very first time they had indulged in the most faintly favourable hopes of her was on this Sunday afternoon, and even then it was the bonnet which had most of the credit.

Cilla's life was a martyrdom. She had a devouring thirst for pleasure, love, happiness; and she lived a life of repression, of misery, of dull, hateful, wearisome routine. Her governess was a person utterly unfit to be in authority over young people, and, to a nature like Cilla's, high-spirited, passionate, sensitive, she was like an iron fetter eating into the flesh. She was over-bearing—she had the brusque, bad manner which distinguishes some of her compatriots; she ate like a pig; many of her habits were disgusting, and Cilla had the most refined instincts, inherited from her father.

The Fräulein had a yellow, parchment-like skin, and the lightest blue eyes. To add to her other

horrors, she had villanous breath, and poor Cilla would sit beside her, compelled to read out of the same book, writhing in an agony of sickening disgust, till sometimes she would have to rush from the room, and give vent to her loathing and disgust in the solitude of her own chamber.

Cilla, who was the brightest, most intelligent creature in the world, and who would have adored learning for its own sake, hated it because of her instructress. She would not exert her intellect; she even feigned stupidity from sheer exasperation. Her music lesson was a daily torture. She had the finest ear, the sweetest voice, the greatest natural taste for music, but she found reading from notes a severe effort, and her tormentor always chose for her the hardest pieces to read, and those most utterly destitute of tune, lest her quick ear should catch it. She was not permitted to, what the Fräulein called, strum, nor to reproduce on the piano from memory the, to her, delicious strains of waltzes and popular airs which she heard in the streets on bands or organs. She was a devourer of novels; she had an absorbing passion for romance; and her governess kindly entreated that all such reading might be kept out of her way, lest it should distract her from her lessons.

But I am thankful to record that there was a good-natured housemaid who befriended the unhappy, tormented child, and who smuggled the

library-books from the drawing-room, and hid them under the mattress of Cilla's bed.

Morning, noon, and night was Cilla chained to her monster, hateful as Frankenstein's: she breakfasted, learned, walked, dined in her detested company, whilst her mother and sister, charmingly dressed, took their pleasure abroad, or received visitors, and amused themselves at home. Sometimes, rarely now, Cilla, in desperation, flew to her mother, but the result was invariable. She was severely rebuked; her naughtiness, evil disposition, and unamiable temper blamed, and the Fräulein's discipline and authority upheld. And this starving little heart was crying piteously for bread, and the mother offered it a stone with the best and most upright intentions in the world!

Mothers, a word to you. If you allow your children, just at the most sensitive period of their lives, to be condemned to the tyranny and companionship of a person whom they abhor, and who is repulsive to them, you are committing a cruelty, a downright sin, which no efforts, nor sacrifices that you may make in after life, can repair. Rather let your children grow up dunces, than have their angry passions, their resentment fostered. Make them happy; not by indulging their caprices, but by encouraging all that is good, kind, amiable, affectionate, generous in them, and by avoiding, as much as possible, anything that can provoke opposition or anger in

their breasts. Show them how blessed a thing is love and kindness, and how more to be desired than everything in the world is the amiable disposition, the unselfishness that earns us the good will of our fellow men!

Cilla, who cared of all things to love and to be loved, was condemned to hate, and to be unamiable; to suffer one of the worst of human pangs, disgust and anger against herself.

Sometimes, Mrs. St. George and Dorothea, when they had been inconvenienced by one of Cilla's outbursts of passion and despair, discussed the propriety of looking out for a fresh governess; but they invariably came to the conclusion that it would be a great nuisance to change, and that there was no chance of ever getting so clever a person again at such a moderate salary.

Now that Dorothea was to be married, Mrs. St. George began to weave fresh plans. She would take Cilla somewhere for a month whilst Fräulein Steinmann had her holiday; after that, she would leave them at home in London together for two or three months, and go about visiting her friends. When she returned towards the winter, she would dismiss the governess, because she did not wish to be troubled with her constant presence, as she really was not a nice person to have about one, and Cilla should have masters and be gradually made presentable under her mother's eye. She was just six-

teen now, and certainly knew a great deal—yes, in the winter, the Fräulein could go, and the following spring Mrs. St. George would bring Cilla out. It would be very different, of course, from the triumphal progress she had made with her beautiful Dorothea, but a woman of her age must have a pretext for going into society, and Mrs. St. George could not exist without it.

Cilla, therefore, was to benefit by her sister's marriage, and, as she had been more turbulent and unhappy than ever of late, her mother thought it wise to hold out some hope to her for the future if she forbore to worry them at present, and if she would learn all she could before the departure of her governess. Meantime, she was kept entirely in the background—her mother and sister were in the delightful turmoil of buying the trousseau and preparing for the wedding. Lord Belhaven, who remembered her even in the intoxication of his happiness, seldom saw her, though he asked constantly for her.

"She shall come to us," he said to Dorothea, thinking to please his bride-elect, "and we will see if we cannot get that unhappy look out of her eyes," but Dorothea scarcely responded.

One day at luncheon he particularly requested that he might be allowed to see Cilla, and, as he was urgent, Mrs. St. George herself went into the stuffy little third room, where Cilla and her gover-

ness were partaking of the lukewarm remains of the repast prepared in his lordship's honour.

"Lord Belhaven wants to see you, Cilla. Have you not finished your dinner?" (it was only conveyed to them by the housemaid about five minutes ago). "There! you can leave your pudding, or eat it afterwards; go and make yourself look decent, for Heaven's sake!"

Cilla obeys, and a few minutes later enters the drawing-room, where Lord Belhaven is standing alone; occupied, in the absence of his beloved, in worshipping before Downey's last counterfeit presentment of her.

"How do you do, Lord Belhaven?" she says shyly, but not awkwardly nor ungracefully, and she fixes her deep eyes on him in an earnest manner, as is her wont when she addresses anyone.

"How do you do, my dear?" says the young man, taking her hand very kindly. "I am going to be your brother, and you must not call me Lord Belhaven, but Granville. And when I am your brother," his eyes shining with happiness, "you must come to us very often, and there shall be no governess, no lessons—we will all be awfully happy."

He sees now how beautiful those eyes can look when they are lighted by happiness; he is drawn towards her and she to him by some strong bond of sympathy—the desire, perhaps, that each has for love and kindness.

"I have brought you something," he continues, and takes a little case from his pocket.

"Oh!" says Cilla, drawing a deep breath and blushing with pleasure and expectation. She opens the case, and finds a lovely ring of pearls and diamonds.

Then those large eyes are hidden by a sudden mist; her lips quiver, she trembles. Her gratitude, her pleasure are so intense as to be almost pain.

"How kind of you!" she utters in a voice full of emotion. "I don't know how to thank you."

"You thank me enough by being pleased," Lord Belhaven says very kindly, "and you must always wear it for my sake, and think of me."

And he kisses her slim hand with a gallantry unusual to him, because he is of a shy disposition.

"We shall be the greatest friends, I know."

Here Dorothea comes in, and Cilla shows her the ring with ecstasy, and the beauty says sweetly,

"How kind of you, Granville! But you are always so good and thoughtful for everybody," and that little compliment, and the smile which accompanies it, bears immediate fruit, which comes to Dorothea the same night in a pair of single-stone, brilliant ear-rings.

She had said, a trifle pettishly, to her mother, at dinner, that she hoped Granville was not going to turn the child's head by making a ridiculous fuss over her, but, when the ear-rings came, she felt how

wise she had been to smile at him, and look pleasant and sympathetic about her sister.

As for Cilla, she was radiant—what, though the Fräulein's temper was unusually vile to day! the girl was incapable of resentment. She exhibited the ring to the friendly housemaid, then to the lady's maid; she called the cook to the top of the stairs to look at it, and, finally, she darted up to the attic, where a deaf old workwoman was engaged on some of the humbler portion of Dorothea's trousseau. This old seamstress was Cilla's safety valve. It was to her the girl carried her woes, her griefs, her passions, her tales of horror, and hatred of her governess. She was generally at work in the house, helping the maid, who had almost enough to do in waiting upon her fashionable mistresses. And, though she was only a poor, little, ignorant old woman, about four feet and a half high, with toothless old gums, a wart on one eyelid, and a back bent nearly double from sewing, she had a tender, sympathising heart, and took a never failing interest in Cilla's woes and tribulations. It was somewhat of a drawback that she was as deaf as a post, but a means was found of diminishing this inconvenience. Cilla took a slate and pencil with her, on which she wrote with a hasty hand the cruelties of her tormentor. Indignation often made her writing a trifle illegible, and the old lady was not much of a scholar, and with difficulty mumbled the words off the slate,

nodding her head sympathetically, and crying shame on the Fräulein.

Sometimes she made a great muddle of the pencilled narrative; then Cilla, too impatient to wait, would go on her knees and shout into her friend's ear, with one eye on the door, in expectation of seeing the enemy appear. Sympathy was all she wanted, and she got it in full measure up in this attic, amongst shreds of finery, from the poor, humble little soul, whose life had been hard enough, and who could yet be cheerful and thank God for all his mercies. Cilla was comforted to know from her friend that she had the sympathy and commiseration of maid, housemaid, cook, and footman, who all voted it a shame that she should be tied to her lessons and that horrid old "Frawline," whom they, too, hated.

In return for Mrs. Pearce's complaisance, Cilla would listen, with the friendliest interest, to her talk about her grand-children; her eulogies of them, and her strictures upon Maria, her daughter in law, who spent her earnings, and treated her with harshness and disrespect. Cilla had heard these stories many and many a time, but she continued to go through a pantomime expressive of surprise, sympathy, horror, indignation at each repetition. Cilla was quite aware that there was a good deal of sameness about her own talk.

The wedding was fixed for the third week in

July, and Cilla was anticipating with considerable rapture the ceremony in which she was to assist as bridesmaid, in company with the Ladies Mabel and Muriel Eton, cousins of the bridegroom, and three young ladies picked from the most select of Miss St. George's acquaintance. Cilla loved fine apparel; it was no fault of hers, poor child, that she was dowdy and unbecomingly dressed, and wore frightful hats which concealed the best part of her face. And on the wedding-day, dressed in palest blue with much soft lace, artificial tea-roses in her bonnet and a bouquet of real ones in her hand, Colonel Lynn, who was present, in spite of his words to Dorothea, pronounced her charming, and several others amongst the wedding-guests echoed his verdict.

"I did not even know Mrs. St. George had another girl," said a mother of two plain daughters discontentedly to a sister chaperon.

"Nor I," replied the other cheerfully, because her daughter was just about to contract a desirable match. "Quite a nice-looking girl too, though of course nothing like the bride."

"I never like those great eyes," said the first speaker. "I expect she has a very bad temper."

Cilla's temper, however, underwent a considerable improvement in the weeks following her sister's marriage. Mrs. St. George was very lonely without her darling Dorothea, and took Cilla out frequently

with her for company. There was scarcely anyone left in town. The girl was no longer shabby and unbecomingly dressed: she too had her trousseau, having come into the inheritance of Dorothea's handsome wardrobe. The beginning of August she went for a month to Ryde with her mother, and spent in that rather dull watering-place so delightful a time that she ever after looked upon it as a Paradise. Her mother was astonished at the change in her; the gray feathers of the cygnet were rapidly moulting, and the beautiful white plumage of the swan beginning to show. She could never, never, Mrs. St. George told herself, take the place of her darling Dorothea, whose thoughts and ideas were moulded exactly on the pattern of her own, but still she would be better, a great deal better, than nothing. She tried to instil a few worldly-wise maxims into Cilla; then, as the girl looked at her with those great, pure eyes, listening in silence, respectful but evidently not sympathetic, the mother had a sort of shamed, uncomfortable feeling, as though her maxims were sordid and shabby, instead of prudent and golden, as Dorothea had found them. Cilla was what is called romantic; there was only one god in the Mythology for her that was Eros. Crœsus was an ogre, a monster; and money, to her unpractical young thoughts, of no more account than the yellow leaves before Midas transmuted them to gold.

At Ryde, Cilla for the first time made friends

with the sea that was in the future to give some of the happiest hours to her life. Two or three of her mother's acquaintances had yachts here, and took Cilla out with them. Mrs. St. George was a poor sailor, and declined excursions for herself unless the sea was like a mill-pond. But Cilla, who fortunately was not a victim to the most horrid sensation imaginable, loved to cut through the dashing waves, and to feel the salt spray and the gallant winds striking her face and blowing back her hair—it gave her a sense of power, of grandeur, of satisfaction.

She was made *au fait*, too, of the little gallantries and flatteries of men of the world, and their pleasant speeches and attentions filled her hungry soul with keen delight. To have been a sad, sorrowful, ugly, tormented child, and to be turned into a charming, considered young woman was to her a wonderful, delightful metamorphosis indeed. She had thought the world a miserable place; she had held very pessimist views in her sad young heart, and now, it was a rose garden, vaulted by an ever-blue sky, where everyone was young, and beautiful, and happy. Sometimes the thought crept over her like a nightmare that she would have to leave this Paradise, and return to her tormentor. Her mother was going first to Scotland, to visit Lady Belhaven, and Cilla was to be left alone with Fräulein Steinman. Lord Belhaven had begged very hard that

Cilla should accompany Mrs. St. George, but the latter was inflexible. "As it was," she said, "sixteen and a half would be a great deal too young for Cilla to be emancipated from the school-room, and she must work very, very hard for the next three months."

Cilla was happy, radiant, affectionate, confiding with her mother—that is, to a certain extent. She would have felt as much ashamed to confess her romantic imaginings to the elder lady as Mrs. St. George would have been to relate to her the little machinations and meannesses by which she had taken and kept her hold on society.

But Cilla had read to her mother some of her poetic effusions, which were really of considerable merit, and had astonished her still more by giving some recitals from Shakespeare with a passion and pathos that caused something like moisture in the eyes of a lady not very susceptible to imaginary woes.

She immediately thought of private theatricals.

There was a piano in their rooms, and Cilla sang to herself by the hour, as her mother dozed after dinner. This gift was also a revelation to Mrs. St. George, for, when Cilla had been called upon to perform at home, she had been so terribly nervous that the effect of her voice was quite marred.

Dorothea married to a Viscount; Cilla changing rapidly from an ugly duckling to a swan, with splen-

did possibilities in front of her! Mrs. St. George sighed, and owned that Providence was good, and sometimes rewarded virtuous mothers.

Cilla, who, at the present moment, asked nothing more than a lay figure round which to wrap and fold the great mantle of her love, began to adore her mother, and, having the most forgiving, the least malice-bearing disposition in the world, forgot that she had been treated with neglect and harshness, and was content that all the past should be blotted out in present love and kindness.

Time sped on with cruel swiftness. It was already the eve of their departure from Ryde. Mrs. St. George had spent a dull month, and was eager to join her lovely Viscountess in Scotland, but poor Cilla was in despair, and, just before going to bed on that melancholy last night, gave way to one of her passionate outbursts of crying.

Her mother was annoyed; Cilla's tears, so far from softening her heart, had an irritating effect upon it.

"My dear Cilla," she said in a cold, aggrieved voice, "I thought we had done with all these scenes."

"Oh, my darling mother!" cried the poor child, convulsed with sobs, "I cannot bear the thought of your leaving me. I have been so happy, and now I am going back to that dreadful woman who always makes me feel angry and ill-tempered and unhappy."

"You should not give way to your evil tempers," remarked Mrs. St. George severely.

Oh, Mamma, Mamma!" wept Cilla, "I don't think I am really ill-tempered: I have never felt cross once in the last month."

Mrs. St. George answered coldly,

"I suppose even the most unamiable person in the world cannot give way to temper with absolutely no provocation. Fräulein Steinman is a very clever person—you would never have got on with a governess if she had been an angel from Heaven. And, remember, it depends entirely on how your studies progress whether she leaves in November."

And Cilla, thirsting for a caress and a few kind words, went uncomforted to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

It was on a gloomy, drizzling day, the first week in September, that Cilla returned to town with her mother. The Fräulein had arrived before them, and the girl's heart sank like lead into the sea as she beheld the detested face and felt the hateful touch of her tormentor's hand once more. Two days later, Mrs. St. George was to start by the night mail for Scotland, and she had so much to arrange in the meantime that Cilla only saw her for a few moments in the day.

The poor child had made grand resolutions; she meant to work; she meant to control her temper; she meant to take life calmly, and not to allow herself to be irritated, but the wound which had been healing all this last month broke out afresh the moment the iron was replaced. It is no use; if two natures are thoroughly unsympathetic, the moment they are brought into contact, irritation and ill-feeling are bound to ensue.

It was the second afternoon following Cilla's return home, and she was seated at her lessons in the little third room, of which the door happened to be ajar. The Fräulein was in a fiendish humour. Mrs. St. George had called her aside after luncheon, and requested that she would not be too strict with Cilla in her absence, and that she would allow her to play on the drawing-room piano as often as she pleased, and after her own fashion.

Cilla was feeling weary and oppressed. The early afternoon is an abominably bad time to study. She had gone through a long hard morning's work, and after the freedom, the indolence and the fresh breath of the sea, this small stuffy room, giving on the wall of another house, and the continued strain on her mind, were intolerably oppressive.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Cilla pricked up her ears. The servant answered it, and she heard a cheery voice she knew asking for Mrs St. George.

It was Colonel Lynn, and, as the servant answered in the affirmative, he came in. Cilla flew to the door and peeped through the little opening.

"Cilla, what are you doing there!" cries the Fräulein in an irate voice, but her pupil heeds her not. "Come away from the door directly!" shrieks the Fräulein. Still Cilla lingers. "Sit down this instant!" screams her governess still louder, whilst scintillations of wrath gleam from her light blue eyes.

"I am tired—I *cannot* work this afternoon," says Cilla, returning to her seat. "I want air."

"Such laziness!" mutters the German, glaring at her. "That comes of long holidays."

Cilla is on tenter-hooks. She thinks, hopes, agonisingly desires that her mother may send for her. The long minutes crawl on, broken only by the goadings of her governess, and then Colonel Lynn's step is heard descending the stairs, and his cheery voice, uttering parting words.

"Remember me to Miss Cilla," he is saying. "Tell her how awfully disappointed I am not to see her. And my kindest regards to Lady Belhaven. It is very hard lines to lose my shooting this year, but we poor soldiers——"

He finishes his sentence with a laugh, and goes. When the door has closed upon him, Cilla presses her hands to her face, and a couple of tears ooze through her fingers.

"That is pretty," cries the Fräulein sardonically; "so maidenly, so modest to cry after a gentleman."

And, to distract her pupil's thoughts, she immediately gives her a difficult piece of German grammar to study.

The days went by. Mrs. St. George had joyfully departed for Scotland, and Cilla was left alone in prison, to the tender mercies of her gaoler. The thraldom was more cruel than ever, for her old friend, the work-woman, had departed, her occupation being gone with Dorothea; the good-natured housemaid had married, there were no library books to read, and the girl's sole amusement and resource was the piano, on which she infuriated the Fräulein by "strumming," as that lady called it. The poor child tried to buoy herself up with the thought of her coming freedom, but December was such a long, long way off, and Mrs. St. George, afraid to give the governess her three months' *congé* in person, had deferred making the announcement to her until she could do so by letter. When the Fräulein received the intimation, her temper became more unbearable than ever, and Cilla began to cast about in her mind whether she would openly revolt, run away, or drown herself in the Serpentine. Little did she dream how near was her emancipation, nor by what terrible means it was to be effected.

One evening, some three weeks after her mother's

departure, she was sitting at the piano in the back drawing-room singing melancholy little songs to herself; songs in harmony with her own mental depression, and dismal thoughts of life. Her surroundings were eminently suggestive of gloom: the furniture was shrouded in holland, the large pieces, covered with old sheets, looking particularly ghostly. One candle alone illumined the darkness, and every now and then an uncomfortable nervous sensation would creep over Cilla, who was somewhat given to vague terrors.

All at once the door opened with startling suddenness, and a man entered. Cilla jumped up with a little shriek, more frightened than ever when she recognised Lord Belhaven. His face was grave and anxious: in an instant she divined that something was wrong.

"What is it? Mamma?" and her terrified eyes looked wildly at him.

He stooped, and kissed her cheek with a tenderness that confirmed her worst suspicions.

"My poor little girl!" and he drew her to the sofa. "I have some bad news for you. Your poor mother is very ill."

Cilla sat staring at him with a white, scared face, full of terrible anticipations. He had taken one of her hands, and was stroking it kindly, feeling as wretched as a good-hearted man always does at

being the bearer of evil tidings. But he summoned up courage, and went on.

"She had been suffering from neuralgia, and, two days ago, we had the doctor to her. He sent her a medicine and a lotion, and did not take the precaution to put the two things in different coloured bottles, nor even to label one 'poison,' and—and—in the night, she took the wrong one by mistake. Everything was done that could be done, but we fear——"

Cilla had snatched her hand from him, and flung herself upon her knees.

"Oh, God!" she cried with an agony of intensity. "Save poor Mamma! Save poor Mamma!"

And she clasped her hands together, and gazed upwards, as though her eyes could pierce the ceiling to the vault of Heaven. Lord Belhaven's mouth worked; a dimness came before his eyes. Then he drew Cilla gently back to her place beside him, and murmured,

"My poor, dear little child; it is too late."

Then Cilla understood him, and, trembling, she gasped out—

"Oh! what shall I do? What shall I do?"

A blinding rain of tears fell from her eyes; her slight frame was convulsed with sobs, and Lord Belhaven laid her head against his shoulder, and stroked her hair, and soothed her with kind, tender words, as though he had in very deed been her

elder brother. And, even in the midst of her anguish, there was a strange comfort to Cilla in his tenderness. It was something so new to her to have a heart on which to lean her head, and sheltering arms to enfold her in her misery.

He let her cry unrestrained until the first paroxysm was over. At last, between her sobs, she asked news of Dorothea.

"Has it not killed Thea?" she said.

It seemed to her that, if her heart was broken, what must Dorothea feel, who had been the mother's idol; her constant companion from childhood!

"Poor darling!" answered Lord Belhaven. "She is bearing up wonderfully. Mrs. Wentworth is with her. I have come up to—to make arrangements, and to tell you. I would not have you written to."

Cilla faintly pressed his hand in thanks.

"Does—does Fräulein Steinman know?" she asked.

"I told the servant who let me in to tell her. I shall come and see you in the morning," he said, preparing to depart. "And—and—I will send some one round from Jay's, to see about your mourning. Leave everything to them, to provide what is proper."

Cilla felt inclined to cling to him, and beg him not to go away. She shrank more than ever from her unsympathetic governess in this hour of anguish, but she restrained herself, and only said, with her great eyes fixed imploringly upon him,

"You *will* come to-morrow? You promise?"

And he promised, with unmistakable sincerity.

Cilla lay awake half the night wondering what was to become of her. The future was a terrible blank. She dared not hope that Dorothea would take her. Would she be sent to school? Then her thoughts reverted to her mother. "Poor dear Mamma! Poor, poor Mamma!" and her sobs burst out afresh.

The tenderest, fondest mother could not have been lamented with more heart-felt grief.

Mrs. St. George's remains were to be brought from Scotland, and buried beside her husband in Kensal Green.

Every day Lord Belhaven came once or twice to see Cilla, and each time he found her whiter, more woe-begone. Her face haunted him. She had not had courage yet to speak to him of the future.

It was the evening of the funeral: on the morrow he was to return to Scotland, and he came to see her for the last time. He, too, had been exercised in his mind about this poor, pale, sorrowful child. He had had plans and ideas about her, but they had been over-ruled by Dorothea. As she advanced to meet him in ber deep mourning, her face whiter, more sorrowful; her eyes larger, more intense than ever, it struck him that it was a positive brutality to leave her with no one but a cross-grained, unsympathetic German, whom he knew she disliked.

But the child had made up her mind to speak, and as he sat beside her on the sofa she broke out suddenly,

"Oh, Granville, what is to become of me!"

Lord Belhaven's answer was on his lips when he remembered Dorothea's injunctions. "She *must* go on with her governess till Christmas. I can't have that woman in my house; they can go on living together for the present, and after Christmas the furniture will be sold and the house let."

Lord Belhaven braced himself up to speak, very much against his inclination.

"My dear child," he said, "you are so young, only sixteen and a half, you know, you must go on studying a little longer. Dorothea thinks, that is, we think if you would just go on as you are till Christmas—"

Then with a sudden movement Cilla flung herself on her knees before him.

"Oh, Granville, I implore you, don't leave me with *her!* I cannot bear it. I would rather die. Oh! if you knew the torture my life is with her, you would not condemn me to it! Oh, have pity upon me! have pity upon me!"

There was such terrible pathos in her voice, such eloquence in her streaming eyes, that Lord Belhaven's mind was made up in an instant. He idolised Dorothea, "but, great God! one has a heart in one's body!" he said to himself later, when a

misgiving about his prudence in going against his wife's wishes crossed his mind.

"Say no more, my child!" he said, lifting her up—"you and Dawson" (her mother's maid) "go to Scotland with me to-morrow. I will see the Fräulein, and give her her *congé*."

Cilla was almost frightened.

"Oh!" she stammered, "what will Dorothea say!"

"She is your sister," he replied, "and she will receive you with open arms."

In his heart of hearts, he was not quite so positive on that score.

"Go, my dear," he continued, in his cheeriest voice, "make all your arrangements, and ask Miss Steinman to be so good as to come here and speak to me, or, if she prefers it, I will go to her."

Lord Belhaven passed rather a *mauvais quart d'heure* with the governess, who was furious, and did all she could to oppose him. Mrs. St. George would not have wished it—Lady Belhaven did not wish it—she had received that morning a letter from her ladyship containing her views about Cilla's immediate future.

Lord Belhaven replied that, when he had explained matters to her ladyship, he was certain that she would approve of what he had done, and that his decision was irrevocable.

The Fräulein considered herself grossly ill-

treated—to be turned away after long and valuable services like a dog.

Lord Belhaven assured her that, on the contrary, every consideration should be paid to her comfort and convenience—that she could remain in the house until she had provided herself with another abode, and that, pecuniarily, she should not in any way be a loser.

He was polite but determined; the governess was so irate that she exhibited frankly to him the charming disposition with which she was gifted, and, when he left the house, he said to himself over and over again,

"Thank God I decided to take the child away from that fiend! I should have been the most infernal brute alive to leave her."

Next day he and Cilla and Dawson, who had performed prodigies in the way of packing, were speeding to the North. Lord Belhaven had telegraphed to his wife, "Cilla is coming with me. When you hear all, you will know I was right."

Her ladyship, as it happened, was anything but pleased by the receipt of this intelligence, and her lovely face puckered into a very decided frown.

"What on earth am I going to do with that uncomfortable child?" she said to herself pettishly. "I hope she will not be making scenes here. If she does, I shall pack her off to school."

But, after her first feeling of irritation had sub-

sided, being naturally of a placid and easy-going disposition, she made the best of it.

"She and Bel can enjoy their highflown ideas together," she reflected. "After all, Cilla may be very useful in taking him off when he bores me. Perhaps he will find her sympathetic. All your tiresome people who can't be like the rest of the world want sympathy. I hate the very word."

So Dorothea decided to make the best of it, and, as she never showed temper nor unamiable feeling, she received Cilla in a pretty, sisterly way, although she was horribly bored by the girl flinging herself on her neck and bursting into tears, called forth by the divided emotions of grief and joy.

Lord Belhaven was in such a state of rapture at seeing his darling again, that he almost forgot Cilla, and everything else. Her ladyship found it convenient to check his extravagant demonstrations by saying gently,

"It seems heartless, with poor dear Mamma only just dead, to allow ourselves to be happy," and her husband, sadly and reluctantly, respected the sorrow which animated her reproof.

"I wonder," thought Dorothea, "what would happen if two volcanoes like Bel and Cilla came together? There would be only smoke and ashes left, I suppose," and she smiled to herself at her own humour.

She had left off calling her husband Granville.

"It is such a mouthful," she said, "and I can't call you Granny. I shall say Bel, as all your men friends do. They won't be able to call us 'Bel and the Dragon,' will they?"

When the exuberance of Lord Belhaven's joy at being reunited with his darling had been tempered by her gentle melancholy, he remembered Cilla.

"It would have been a positive crime," he said, "to leave the poor child with that detestable woman. She is the most unsympathetic woman I ever saw."

Dorothea smothered a yawn. The word sympathy invariably produced that unpleasant affection of the jaws with her.

"Upon my soul!" he proceeded with warmth, "I cannot conceive how she ever stood the life so long. I wonder your poor mother——"

"Oh, please don't say a word against poor dear Mamma!" interrupted Dorothea. "I could not bear it. Whatever she did was always meant for the best."

"My darling love!" cried Lord Belhaven, "I would not blame her for the world now she is gone, poor soul. Only I don't think people sufficiently appreciate the importance of sympathy" (Dorothea yawns again) "in our relations with those about us. Cilla, with her intensely sensitive organisation—"

"You will be better able to judge of Cilla when you have spent a few weeks under the same roof with her," interrupted her ladyship, with some dry-

ness. "She is not so easy to manage as you seem to think. And what is to become of her education? She is only sixteen and a half. I hope, my dear Bel, you do not propose my saddling myself with a governess, and setting up a school-room?"

"My own sweet love!" said Lord Belhaven, just a little bit *froissé* by her tone, "do you think I would do anything in this world that could vex or inconvenience you? And though Cilla is so young, it is amazing what she knows. She speaks French and German perfectly; she plays and sings divinely —in fact——"

"In fact she is quite a paragon," remarked Dorothea sweetly.

"She can have masters when she has a chance, and she and I might study a little together. I know she could teach me heaps of things."

"Ah!" said Dorothea, looking bored, "that will be delightful. You will be able to work off some of your exuberant vitality upon each other. I hope you two wise people won't make me feel too foolish."

"Dorothea!"

But as the reader will hardly be interested to hear the extravagant laudations of an enamoured husband, he shall be spared Lord Belhaven's further remarks.

The days went on, and Cilla's altered experiences and mode of life made a new creature of her. No sister was ever more devoted to brother than she

became to Dorothea's husband. His kindness was like rain upon her parched heart: the absence of opposition and harsh control transformed her entirely —if it had not been for her grief at her mother's death, she would have been the happiest of the happy. She had never travelled—the Scotch scenery, its mountains, forests, lakes, its colouring, its grandeur, sweetness, and stillness, filled her heart with unutterable emotion. She was not of a gushing disposition—her raptures made her silent; it was the intense look in her eyes, the quiver of her lip, the involuntary closing of her hands, that told Lord Belhaven's sympathetic heart what she felt under the influence of these new scenes.

They were the most congenial companions; he could talk to her on subjects that would have made Dorothea yawn till her jaws ached, and she listened with an interest, an intelligence that charmed him. And they had so many ideas in common; they were not ashamed to tell each other of the throes their heart-hunger had made them suffer—the word sympathy was as sweet to them as it was tiresome to Dorothea.

Lord Belhaven listened with the greatest interest to Cilla's reminiscences of Fräulein Steinman, and thanked God from his heart that he had been the means of rescuing the girl from her martyrdom. She was not idle; she read and wrote French and German; she practised; she cultivated in secret her

talent for reciting, and learned her favourite poems by heart.

When Dorothea, as was often the case, was not inclined to accompany her husband in his drives and walks on non shooting-days, Cilla took her place, and though Belhaven was too much in love not to have desired the company of Dorothea in preference, the excursions made with Cilla were really productive of more pleasure to him in the end. Dorothea smiled sweetly at him, but she had not much to say; she did not care a straw for nature, and he felt that she was bored: a cruel feeling to experience in the society of one's heart's beloved. In the evening Cilla played and sang, and Belhaven sat at his beautiful wife's feet and looked into her eyes with the rapture born of his passion and Cilla's pathetic music, and felt more near to being divinely happy than he had ever done in his life. If the same woman could have created the sentiment and the passion, it would have been Heaven at once; but, even in his most adoring moments, Belhaven could not help realising that the charms of his exquisite wife were of the person, and not the mind.

Dorothea was agreeably surprised at the change in her sister. There were no scenes or storms now. Cilla's great desire seemed to be to please, and to be kind to everyone. Nothing, however, astonished Lady Belhaven so much as the alteration in her appearance. Dawson, (the maid), took a great in-

terest in her young lady, and in making the best of her, and Cilla, having the keen love of approbation which is born in every sympathetic woman, was only too glad to lend herself to Dawson's laudable efforts.

"Really," said Dorothea with great emphasis to her husband, "I could not have believed Cilla would turn out so well. I think she will be almost pretty."

"She will be more than pretty," answered Lord Belhaven; "she will be charming. More than one man's heart will ache for her sake. I hope to God," with great earnestness, "that she will take a fancy to some good fellow who will understand and be able to sympathise with her."

"I hope," returned Dorothea lightly, "that she will make a good match."

He turned suddenly towards her.

"Did you marry me because you loved me, or because I was a good match?" he said, and then, before she could answer, he stopped her lips with a passionate kiss, and, crying "No, no, don't answer me!" dashed from the room.

"Oh, these volcanoes!" murmured Dorothea wearily. And then she proceeded to run over in her mind the men of her acquaintance who were eligible as *partis* for Cilla.

CHAPTER V.

It is a November afternoon. Outside all is chill and dark, but in this room to which I bring the reader there is comfort, warmth, luxury. The firelight alone illumines it, but the logs in the wide chimney are sending forth such bright, fierce flames that you can see into every corner. The panelling, the chimney-piece are of dark, carved oak; there is one large, latticed window, across which the heavy velvet draperies have not yet been drawn. On the wall are many pictures, whose frames look bright in the cheerful blaze, though their subjects, for the most part, can only be guessed at. There are a few massive pieces of furniture, old inhabitants evidently, and then, to tell the stranger who glances in that women live here, there are dainty occasional tables, on which are set glasses filled with flowers, satin and lace work-baskets, library books, and, near the fire, a semi-grand piano standing open. The room is tenantless—so thinks a man who looks in at the half-open door, but another glance shows him a picture which he finds so attractive that he remains to take a longer view of it. A slight, girlish form is buried in a vast arm-chair in one chimney-corner, her dress and the velvet of the chair are so dark

that only her pale, oval face and two very white, taper little hands come into relief.

Until he can make up his mind whether to advance or retreat, the stranger continues to look at the unconscious occupant of the big chair. She is gazing dreamily into the fire, and he remarks that she has very large and beautiful eyes, and that she is not at all like most girls, particularly the young ladies of fashion, who are his acquaintances.

Marmaduke Vereker, the man who stands in the doorway, is not good at analysing sensations, nor does he ever trouble himself to attempt so laborious a mental effort—he only knows, or cares to know, that this slender figure interests him even at first sight: an extremely rare occurrence, one which has, indeed, as far as he knows, only happened to him once before in his life, and then with the most serious and lasting results.

The unexplained magnetic attraction which draws the eyes sooner or later of the gazed upon to the gazer causes Cilla, deep as she is in reverie, to turn her eyes towards the door, and behold a very big, manly form looming there.

She gives a little cry of terror, for she is of a highly nervous disposition, being one of those who, fearless in actual danger, are ready to die of agony at an unexplained noise or sudden apparition. This cry and the momentary look of fear in the girl's

startled eyes bring Mr. Vereker into the room in a hurry, and he comes straight up to her and says,

"I frightened you. How awfully sorry I am!"

But Cilla has grasped the situation even before he reaches her, and rising, her face bedecked with a beautiful blush, she says,

"I did not hear your step. You are Mr. Vereker."

With this, she offers her small hand to his ready clasp, and looks up at him.

What she sees is eminently agreeable. It is a gentleman, distinctly a gentleman, of six feet two in height, whose breadth does justice to his stature; a very pleasant face, with blue eyes, a big nose, and a mouth which, if not curved like Cupid's bow, has two rows of white teeth that are even more important to good looks. He is not perhaps handsome; he is a fine man, and what women call a *nice*-looking man. His age may be about two or three and thirty.

These details Cilla masters at a glance, whilst he, with his duller senses, has by no means taken a thorough inventory of her, but has only arrived at the conclusion that she pleases him.

"This comes of taking liberties," he remarks with a smile. "I forgot, now Belhaven is married, I must not run in and out as I used to. I drove round to the stables and came in the back way."

"But they were expecting you," Cilla hastens to assure him. "They have gone to return a visit

rather a long way off, but they will be home very soon now. Will you have some tea?"

Cilla, not yet having been introduced to polite society, does not supplement her offer with, "or some sherry and bitters, or a brandy and soda?"

"Are you going to have any?" inquires Mr. Vereker, and she responds in the affirmative and rings the bell.

"And how do you like Blankshire and Red Meade?" asks Duke, by which name he is known to all his friends and acquaintances. For the Belhavens and Cilla have left Scotland, and are established at Lord Belhaven's country seat.

"I like it very much, but it seems a little tame and flat after Scotland," answers Cilla.

"It's a glorious country for hunting," says Duke with enthusiasm. "Do you hunt?"

"No. I am only just learning to ride. Granville is teaching me; he has bought me such a beautiful horse."

"Granville!" repeats Mr. Vereker inquiringly.

"Lord Belhaven."

"Oh, Bel! I didn't know he had any other name than Bel. And you are—and he is your——"

"Brother-in-law," supplies Cilla. "Lady Belhaven is my sister."

"Your sister!" echoes Duke in a tone of surprise. "You are not a bit like her."

"No," says Cilla.

And even Duke, who is not very quick at reading faces, sees the mortified look that creeps into the girl's face.

"There are different styles of beauty," he says blunderingly. "Now I——"

But the advent of tea and the stimulants, which the butler, who knows Mr. Vereker's habits, brings without orders, cuts short his sentence.

"Shall I open the soda-water, sir?" says the servant.

"No, thank you, Humphreys. I am going to have some tea."

Humphreys would have stared had not the inner consciousness that he would lose caste by doing so prevented him.

Whilst Cilla pours out the tea, Duke watches her with a sort of fascination. He accepts both cream and sugar from her, though the whole thing is nauseous to him, and then he carefully, after pretending to sip it, carries the cup away to a little table, as though he has finished it, and it is empty.

Why Duke, who is in the habit of drinking brandies and sodas at all times, and in all places, when he feels disposed, should have an instinct that there is a sort of profanity in following his custom in this young girl's presence, I am unable to say. The fact remains.

A quarter of an hour has elapsed since they

first made acquaintance, and they are talking as if they were old friends. Duke, who finds conversation with almost every woman but one rather uphill work, has plenty to say, and, young as she is, Cilla having the natural sympathy of which tact is only an imitation, is not afflicted by shyness or *gaucherie*.

"Do you live with your sister?" Mr. Vereker inquires, and Cilla, lowering her eyes and speaking with a certain tremor in her voice, says,

"I have no one else now since poor Mamma——"

"Of course, of course," interrupts Duke awkwardly. "But you are very young; at least, you look so. You are not out yet, are you?"

"I am sixteen and a half," she says with perfect frankness.

"Quite a child," he remarks, looking at her with increased interest, and feeling that there is a great deal of the woman in her already.

"And you don't go to school?" he inquires.

"I have never been to school," she replies, and then, as though she had known him all her life, she tells him how Belhaven (or Granville, as she calls him, because he likes it) rescued her from her miserable life with her governess.

"He's a thundering good fellow is Bel," says Duke approvingly. "It would have been an awful shame to leave you with that old cat. I shall often be at my place now I've got you for neighbours. Lady Belhaven must come over and see me, if I can

persuade her, and bring you. Are you fond of animals?"

"I love all animals," Cilla answers with kindling eyes.

"So do I. I don't think anyone can be much good who doesn't," answers Duke, unconscious that he is paying a tribute to himself, whilst merely desiring to offer one to her.

"I used to think so," she says gravely. "But, do you know, that some of the most wicked and cruel people who ever lived have been devoted to animals?"

"No! Not really!" exclaims Duke rather shocked at this upsetting statement. "Do you like cats?" somewhat abruptly.

"Yes, cats, dogs, horses; everything," answers the girl.

"When you come over, I'll take you round my stables," pursues Duke. "I've got the most splendid lot of cats; all English tabbies. There's one for every horse, and they sit on their backs, and never make a mistake about their own."

"Really!" cries Cilla, deeply interested.

"And I've got a lot of dogs, too," continues Mr. Vereker, warming to his subject. "A collie and two retrievers in the house, and a terrier, Jack. You shall see him catch rats."

"No, no," exclaims Cilla. "I would not see it for the world. I *hate* anything cruel."

Duke looks a shade perplexed. It has never occurred to him that there is any cruelty in killing rats.

"But they've got to be killed, you know," he says apologetically.

"Perhaps," she replies. "But I cannot understand how there can be any pleasure in *seeing* anything tortured."

Duke reflects a moment, and is rewarded by an inspiration.

"I don't think, after all," he says, "that it is the pleasure of seeing the rats killed. It's the pluck of one's dog that one likes. Such a bit of a fellow; and he goes in and tackles a great rat as if it was a mouse."

Cilla accepts the explanation. She likes her new acquaintance, and would be sorry to think anything to his detriment.

"Never mind," remarks Duke heartily. "I'll take care you shall only see what you like when you do come."

Here the door opens, and Lord and Lady Belhaven enter.

"So sorry not to be here to receive you," says her ladyship in her pretty, gracious way.

"By Jove! she *is* a lovely woman," thinks Duke, "but——" and he steals a look at Cilla.

"Your sister has done the honours," he says smiling. "We've been getting on tremendously."

"That is right," returns Dorothea approvingly. "Cilla dear, I hope you've got a nice hot cup of tea for me. We've had such a cold, wretched drive."

Cilla, who never forgets the comfort of anyone, takes the cosy from the tea-pot, and supplies her sister, whilst Lord Belhaven and Duke are assiduous in waiting upon her.

"I'm so glad you've come to the Court," says Dorothea with a sweet smile. "Do tell me that you are going to stop! it is so very dull and quiet here. Of course, just at present, we cannot have people to stay," and she drops her eyes, but Duke remarks to himself that she betrays much less feeling in alluding to her loss than her sister had done.

"I shall be here, on and off, all the winter," he rejoins. "My sister is coming to-morrow. Now, Lady Belhaven," putting a tone of genuine entreaty into his hearty voice, "I want you to do me a great favour."

Dorothea smiles upon him in a manner that augurs well for the success of his prayer.

"I want you and your sister, and Bel, of course, to drive over the day after to-morrow, and dine and stay the night."

Her ladyship's smile fades into gravity.

"You know," she says gently, "we do not go anywhere at present."

"But you will not mind my sister," he pleads.

"There shall not be another soul but her and Chester."

"You must let me think about it," utters Dorothea.

Happening to glance at Cilla, she perceives that her sister is looking very eagerly at her, as though greatly interested in her decision.

"What do you think, Bel?" she says, glancing up in a pretty, appealing way at her husband.

"I shall think what you wish me to, my darling," he answers.

During the whole evening Lady Belhaven is in a state of perplexity. Some of her most fixed ideas are being shaken and upset. In the first place, she has been accustomed to a monopoly of the other sex; in her society, men have rarely had eyes or ears for anyone else, unless some particular syren of their own happened to be present. The fact of her having married Lord Belhaven can by no means be expected to interfere with her charm for other men. In these halcyon days for married women, (days of corresponding purgatory for husbands), beauties command more homage and admiration after they are appropriated than before.

But, at dinner, whilst she talks in her most fascinating manner to Duke, somewhat to the detriment of Belhaven's peace of mind, his eyes and attention wander frequently to the contemplation of his *vis-à-vis*. Lady Belhaven is a lovely woman;

there can be no two opinions on that score. Bel is a lucky fellow, but Duke knows so many beauties; has passed under the fire of so many fascinations, that he is proof against mere good looks.

Cilla, in her deep mourning, relieved only by white roses in her hair and at her breast, with her pale face and the strange fire of her lustrous eyes, exercises a sort of spell upon him. It is a pleasure, of which he is distinctly conscious, to meet the gaze of those eyes; her voice, innocent of the caressing modulations of the fashionable woman, has so much more sympathy in it, and, from some strange caprice (seeing that he has never valued the attribute of youth in a woman hitherto), he is fascinated by her childishness, and by the innocence and pure candour that are written unmistakably on her face.

This is the second stumbling-block to Dorothea. She has met Duke frequently in society, and though his manner to women has invariably been courteous and kind, he has never shown the smallest sign of being particularly attracted to any save the one with whom his name has been coupled these ten years. That Cilla, the ugly duckling, of whom she and her mother had despaired, should be able to rouse interest in the steeled breast of Duke Vereker when beauty after beauty has retired vanquished from the assault, is so extraordinary that Lady Belhaven is quite at a loss to understand it.

Duke must be one of those phenomenal men

who are not amenable to beauty like their fellows. Of course, now she comes to think of it, Mrs. Beauclerc is not a bit pretty. She is very clever. And Cilla is clever: fancy a man liking women for being clever! The idea is in itself so disgusting that her ladyship's lovely nose involuntarily "tiptilts," as though something unsavoury had been offered to it.

When the ladies leave them, Lord Belhaven and Duke draw up to the fire, light their cigarettes, and indulge in friendly chat. They have had a lengthy discussion on sporting topics, when Duke says suddenly and apparently *à propos* of nothing.

"How utterly unlike Lady Belhaven and her sister are! I could not have believed they were related."

Belhaven's usual keenness of discernment happens at this time to be blunted by his passion for his wife. He does not read his friend's thoughts, but imagines that his words imply disparagement of Cilla.

"Ah," he returns, affectionately championing her; "you must not judge of Cilla yet. She is a mere child, and of course my wife would make any other woman, not beautiful, look plain. But——"

"You don't understand me, old chap," interrupts Duke warmly, "if you fancy I meant to disparage Miss St. George. I think her simply charming, and you know I'm not a man who goes for beauty.

There's such a lot of it about now, and these pretty women are all the same. They've got their one little set of tricks, and, when you know them, it's always the same thing; but, now, with your sister-in-law, her face and eyes change every time you look at her. You can see she is not thinking about herself nor how she's looking, but about you and what you're saying."

Belhaven is a little surprised. He likes Duke immensely, but has never had much opinion of his mental calibre. This last speech of his exhibits a power of reflection and observation which he had not expected.

"Oh, then, you like Cilla," he says quietly. "I am glad of that. I can hardly tell how she would strike a stranger, being so used to her myself. She has a charming disposition. She is the most sympathetic creature I ever met; and she is just as clever as she can be. Upon my soul, considering her bringing up, I wonder she has turned out as she has."

"What about her bringing up?" asks Duke, deeply interested.

"Why, as far as I can make out," returns Belhaven, "she was left entirely to the mercy of a most infernal old devil of a governess, and her mother never looked after her at all. Poor soul! she's gone now, but I fancy she has a great deal to answer for on that child's account. She's all right now, because she's happy, but, if she comes to be oppressed, or

made wretched later in life; all the bad seeds of rebellion and opposition have been sown in her, and will come up stronger than ever. And I think I never knew a nature that had a more intense capacity for suffering than Cilla's."

"Poor little girl!" says Duke thoughtfully, and with a tender inflexion of voice that he is unaware of. "Let's hope she'll marry some good fellow who'll be awfully good to her, and won't give her any cause to be anything but happy."

"We won't think of a husband for her yet, at all events," rejoins Belhaven a trifle abruptly. "She is only sixteen and a half. With her physique, and her sensitive nature I think it would be downright wrong to let her marry for another four years."

"I don't know how you're going to prevent it," observes Duke, "unless you shut her up in convent. I suppose Lady Belhaven will present her next season, and she'll come out. Then, if a man comes along she fancies—take my word for it, Bel, there'll be lots who'll fancy her—how are you going to prevent her marrying?"

Belhaven gives a little, dissatisfied grunt. He has already discussed the subject with his wife, who has flouted his ideas and expressed her own with pretty firmness.

"Her education is not finished," he says.

"I'll be bound," retorts Duke, "that she has forgotten more than most girls know."

"I daresay," remarks Belhaven drily. "Most girls are as ignorant as carp. Cilla knows so much that it is a shame she should forget it. She speaks French and German perfectly; she sings and plays divinely; she is extremely well read, and—ah! I should like you to hear her recite——"

"Then, in the name of Heaven," interrupts Duke, "what more would you have her do?"

"I would have her keep up what she knows already. And," with a little satire which is lost on his hearer, "there is no danger of anyone knowing too much in our class of life."

"Let's go into the drawing-room, shall we?" says Duke.

CHAPTER VI.

LADY BELHAVEN was sitting in a low chair near the fire; her pretty little feet planted on a stool in front of her, animated, no doubt, by the benevolent desire of giving pleasure to others. She was toying with a feather-screen, and, when the men entered, directed an inviting little smile to Duke. Perhaps he did not observe or understand it; for he walked straight to where Cilla was reading by the light of a shaded lamp. The rose-colour which it reflected on her face was eminently becoming, and, as Duke approached, she lifted her large eyes to his face

with a look of pleasure and welcome. She liked him already; there was something so kindly, so frank and pleasant about him, and his bigness and strength, (attributes of all her heroes), inspired her with respect.

Belhaven drew a stool to his wife's side, and, believing himself unobserved, took her hand, but she withdrew it, smiling, and made a little gesture significant of the decorum to be observed in public. Belhaven, being in that semi-doting state, which, for a brief period, has been known to sap the senses of the most sensible and prudent men, expresses in a low, earnest voice, his contempt for the proprieties, and recovers his prisoner.

Dorothea yawns behind her fan, and that involuntary spasm of the face happening to produce a much more potent effect upon her lord than any considerations of discretion, he releases her at once, and sits staring into the fire, feeling in his heart an agony of disappointment quite unproportioned to the cause. But love-sick people are always irrational; their joys and sorrows are not to be measured nor even guessed at by ordinary folk: they are always plunging straight from Heaven to Hades, or from Hades back to Heaven.

"What is your book about?" says Duke, bringing a low chair to Cilla's side.

"It is a collection of old stories," she answers. "I have just finished one."

"Was it funny?" inquires Mr. Vereker.

"Oh, no!" and her tone is almost reproachful.

"I hate dismal stories," protests Duke, "just as I hate a miserable piece at the play. It gives me a horrid choking feeling in my throat, and then I get so angry that I want to knock some one down."

Cilla regards him pensively.

"I like a book or a play that makes me sad," she says, "because it is so pleasant to wake up and remember that it is not true, after all, and that one is not unhappy on one's own account."

"Unhappy!" cries Duke. "Why, a child like you ought not to know the meaning of the word unhappy!"

"Ah," says Cilla, "that is where people are so mistaken. They say childhood is a happy time. It is not!"—with strange vehemence, whilst her eyes flash—"it is a miserable, wretched, hateful time. I would not be a child again for anything you could offer me."

Duke has never felt so strong, so big, so protecting as he does in talking to this fragile creature, nor yet so weak morally. As he sits there, contemplating the small face, with its strangely expressive eyes, and the hands pressed together, he feels that he is a great blundering fellow, and is half afraid to speak lest he should trample, unwittingly, on the feelings of this sensitive creature.

"What a shame!" he says presently. "How could anyone be unkind to you!"

Cilla, with her imaginativeness, her acute conviction of her wrongs, has yet a strong sense of justice.

"I know a great deal of it was my own fault," she says. "I was tiresome, and disagreeable, and ill-tempered, and obstinate."

"I do not believe it," cries Duke loyally.

A smile lights up Cilla's face. This flattery, so genuinely spoken, is sweet to one to whom the taste of it is quite fresh: she possesses a very keen love of approbation.

"But I was," she insists. "I daresay Fräulein Steinman hated me just as much as I hated her, but then she could have gone away from me, and I could not get away from her. There is nothing so dreadful," very earnestly, "as being tied to some one you hate. That is why children are often miserable. A grown-up person can get away from anyone he does not like."

"Except a husband and wife," says Duke, and is immediately angry with himself for having said it.

Cilla has been kept entirely in the school-room. She has not had the advantage of being put *au courant* with the ways of society by hearing them discussed. Her novels and romances have almost invariably ended with the marriage ceremony, and a short paragraph implying that, *as* the lovers were

united, needs must they were happy ever after. So she looks up at him, and says,

"Ah, but then, they married because they loved each other, and I don't suppose they often want to get away, do they?"

"No," replies Duke hastily, "of course not. But about your story that you were reading."

"I will lend you the book, if you like," she says obligingly.

"No. I would rather have you tell me."

"I don't know whether you would care for it," she observes reflectively. "Are you at all—romantic?"

And then a little blush overspreads her face as she looks at Duke's stalwart from, and feels an unpleasant consciousness of having said something rather ridiculous.

Duke is not acute, but Cilla's eyes are such traitors to her thoughts that he guesses what is passing in her mind.

"I suppose you think a great hulking fellow like me has no business to have any soft feelings," he says. "But, you know, it doesn't always follow."

"No, no," cries Cilla hastily. "I am quite sure you are kind. But being romantic is different—many people think it very silly. Dorothea does" (with a glance at her sister, who is dozing in her chair, whilst Belhaven still stares moodily into the fire).

"And Bel?"

"Oh, he is romantic—quite romantic," Cilla

replies eagerly. "He and I think just alike about hundreds of things."

A sudden instinct flashes across Duke as he too gives a side-long glance at the other couple, that he and Dorothea are something of the same mental calibre, whilst Bel and Cilla are sympathetic. How strange that the opposites and not the similar natures generally come together.

"It seems we shall never get to the story," he says smiling, "and I am dying to hear it."

"I will tell it you, if you like," the girl says simply, "and if you find it stupid, stop me."

"I promise." And then Duke leans back in the chair, and watches her as she bends a little towards him, completely engrossed in her recital, with her beautiful eyes steadily fixed upon him, unconscious of embarrassment.

Cilla could not for the world keep her eyes away from the face of the person to whom she was talking, unless she were angry or offended with him, then she would find it equally impossible to look at the object of her displeasure.

"It happened a long time ago, and in a foreign country," she begins, speaking low, but in a voice very sweet, brimful of expression, and pathetic in the extreme when her tale becomes sorrowful. More than once, during the recital, it gives Duke that choking sensation in the throat which he had deprecated, but, upon this occasion, he feels no desire to

knock anyone down. On the contrary, he is strangely affected by a longing to gather the fragile form to his heart, and to kiss the quivering, sensitive mouth of the young story-teller.

"Once, in a distant land, there lived a maiden," proceeds Cilla. "She was an orphan, and very poor, and she gained her living by making and mending lace. One day, towards dusk, as she was returning from the environs of the city, where she had carried some work, a drunken man offered her rudeness. She tried to fly, but he held her fast. Suddenly she heard the sound of hoofs, and there came by two horsemen. She cried out, and the foremost one stopped, threw the bridle to his companion, and was beside her in a moment. He caught her assailant, and flung him into the ditch; then he turned to her as she stood trembling. She saw by his dress that he was a great lord, and it seemed to her that he had the most noble face she had ever seen. He stooped, and spoke kindly to her.

"'My poor girl,' he said, 'you are too fair to be out so late alone.'

"And, as he looked at her, his eyes pierced to her very soul, so that his image remained there for ever after. Then he gave her a piece of gold, and, bidding his servant remain behind to see that she got safely to the city, rode away, wishing her a courteous God-speed. From that day forth she wore the coin next her heart, and all her soul was filled

with the thought of the great lord, and, every hour, the desire to see him tormented her. So that, when there was a great fête or gala in the city, she would leave her work and go down amongst the crowd, hoping that he might pass, or, she would wait near the gates of his palace to see him ride forth, hiding herself that he might not be aware of her, and devouring his face with her eyes. Then she would return home, and think and dream of him and how he looked, and would say little prayers for him all day long as she made her lace. Once only he saw her, and smiled, and his smile seemed to change all the sad earth into Heaven. But evil days came upon her; the great people went away from the city to their country palaces, and with them went her lord also, and a fever struck her down and wasted her strength, so that she could no longer work, and had scarcely bread to eat. Still she kept the gold piece next her heart, having sewn it in a piece of linen lest some neighbour should see it, and take it from her when she slept, or lay senseless in the fever. Day and night she was tormented by the desire to look upon the face of her lord once more. 'If I might see him again and die,' was her prayer. When the hot months were passed, and the winter came, the great people returned to the city, but she could not rise from her poor bed to seek him. 'I shall die, and shall never see him more,' she wept to herself. One day the maid of the Court physician's

lady brought her some lace to mend, and found her lying wasted, and dying miserably on her straw bed. She told her lady, who was charitable to the poor, and the lady told her husband, and, the same day, he, because he, too, was tender-hearted, came to visit the dying girl in her garret. When he looked at her, he knew there was no more anything to be done for her, because Death had laid his finger upon her. But, because she was very young, and had been fair, he felt pity for her, and spoke gently to her, and asked if she had any wish before she died. 'If I could see him,' she said in a whisper, for all her strength was gone. 'If I could see him!' and she gazed piteously in the great physician's face, 'then I could die gladly.' He made her tell him the name of him she desired, and then he looked grave; for it was the name of one of the greatest lords in the city, and how could he bring such an one here?

"That night there was a ball given at the Court, and the physician was bidden. There, also, was the lord whom the dying girl had named, and a beautiful lady whom he loved. Then the physician, haunted by the memory of that wasted form, and those sad eyes, bethought him to tell the story to the lady who was beloved of the great lord. And when he told her, the tears came to her eyes, and she said pitifully, 'Poor child, it is but a small thing she asks. She shall have her desire.' Then she summoned the lord to her side, and told him of the dying girl, and

said, 'Go to her to-night for my sake; to-morrow she will be dead.' And he answered her, 'I will go for your sake, and for mine.'

"Then he and the physician went away together from the lights and music, the gold, the jewels, and all the pomp and grandeur which the Court held to the miserable garret where the dying girl lay, lighted by the feeble glimmer of a candle that a pitiful neighbour had set there. She lay without moving, and for a moment the physician thought her dead; then, feebly, her eyes unclosed. 'He is here,' he whispered, and a sudden light came to the dim eyes, and she looked up as though her soul had left its earthly frame, and had awoke in Heaven.

"But the noble, standing in the midst of this poverty and misery, was stricken to the heart to think that, whilst he lived in so much splendour, there should be human bodies perishing of want. He came towards her, and there were tears in his eyes.

"'Live, my poor girl!' he said gently, and he bent and took her hands in his. 'I charge myself with the care of you henceforth.'

"Then, as his words fell on her ear, her eyes lighted up for one moment, so that youth and beauty came back to her face.

"'My lord, my lord,' she murmured. 'It is enough.'

"With a great impulse of pity, he stooped and gathered her in his arms, and kissed her brow, and

when he would have gently put her back, she fell from his arms. She was dead, but she had known one moment of joy."

Cilla's eyes are full of tears, and her voice of passion. Duke sits looking at her, his mind absorbed with one thought—

"How that child could love!"

After a moment's silence, he makes a very characteristic remark.

"It is rather a dismal story," he says. "Let us hope it isn't true."

Cilla looks a little disappointed.

"Oh, but I think it is," she replies. "And I like sad stories. I like to think how faithfully she loved him, though he had only spoken those few words to her, and that she died happy because her dream was realised."

"But, now," says Duke, leaning a little towards her, "don't you think it would be pleasanter to think of a girl loving a man as much as that, and of his loving her back again, and, instead of her dying, of their marrying and being awfully happy."

"No," replies Cilla naïvely, "that would be common-place. Most stories end like that."

"Do they?" says Duke dubiously. But he does not think fit to impart any scepticism he may feel on the subject to his listener.

Dorothea's lovely head has fallen forward several times with a little jerk. At this moment it experi-

ences a big jerk, which rouses her thoroughly, and makes her feel a trifle provoked and aggressive. She opens her eyes wide, and beholds her lord moodily contemplating the fire, and Duke and Cilla in animated conversation by the table.

"Mr. Vereker," she says, in a half-piqued, half-jesting tone, "it is too bad of you to leave husband and wife to entertain each other. You see the result—we were both asleep."

At this Duke rises and comes towards her, and Belhaven stalks over to Cilla with an expression of face that she readily reads.

"Sing something, Cilla, will you?" he says.

"No, no," interposes Dorothea with pretty peremptoriness, (she never allows herself to look unamiable, but smiles even when displeased), "we will not have any music to-night. I am bored to death. I shall be asleep in five minutes, if some one does not amuse me. Let us play whist. Cilla dear, get the cards. Bel, please ring for the table. You don't mind, Mr. Vereker, do you?"

Duke does not care about cards. He was much happier talking to Cilla, but he is the best-natured man in the world, and acquiesces readily in his hostess' wish.

"We will not cut for the deal," Lady Belhaven says, as they seat themselves. "Husband and wife, of course, cannot play together!"

Belhaven looks distinctly sulky. Unfortunately,

he is aware of it, and ashamed of himself, but incapable either of changing the feeling or the expression of his face.

Cilla tries, in her sympathetic way, to soothe him, but Dorothea seems to take a malicious pleasure in ruffling him, though she assumes the sweetest, most innocent little air in the world in doing it.

"I am sure you have revoked, darling," she says once or twice, and insists on looking over the tricks; or, "Bel dear, why do you look so bored? Don't you want to play?"

Duke sees that Belhaven is put out, and wonders inwardly, as good-tempered, placid people are wont to do at others who show signs of sulkiness for no apparent cause. If Dorothea had been his wife, she would not have wasted her time in sticking little pins into him, because he would not have felt them, but Belhaven is dreadfully thin-skinned; passionately in love with her, and the hint, before others, that his company is not sufficient to amuse her, galls him beyond expression. He feels disgraced and slighted before Duke, who is perfectly unconscious of the cause of his vexation, and too much engrossed, besides, with Cilla to notice much what her sister is doing.

Cilla is paying the greatest attention to the game; throwing all the earnestness into it which she bestows on everything she does. Duke amuses himself by guessing her hand every deal by the expres-

sion of her face as she takes up her cards, which, indeed, it is by no means difficult to do. He enjoys her little glance of triumph when she trumps his best card or produces her ace; and has to be called to order once or twice by Dorothea for not attending to the game.

When Lady Belhaven is alone with her husband, she says suddenly, continuing her thoughts aloud,

"It really is very extraordinary about Duke."

"What is extraordinary?" inquires Belhaven, who has not quite recovered from his sulkiness.

"Don't you see how much taken he is with Cilla?"

"Why should he not be?"

If Dorothea were to give vent to her thoughts, she might say,

"Because, you ill-tempered idiot, I am beautiful, and Cilla is not. I am a woman of the world, and Cilla is a raw school-girl, therefore it behoves every man, who is in company with us both, to have no eyes or ears for her as long as I am present." But she replies,

"I should not have thought there was anything about Cilla, poor dear child, to attract a man like Duke."

"Duke does not care for pretty women," returns Belhaven, a trifle maliciously. "He was saying so to-night. 'They are all the same,' he says, 'when you once know their little set of tricks.'"

"That is a bore for the pretty women," returns Dorothea sweetly, "because he is so rich."

Belhaven is foolish enough to let her see that her pin has pricked him.

"Rich!" he echoes bitterly. "That is all *pretty* women care for. It doesn't matter whether a man has a heart of gold——"

"Not at all," agrees Dorothea, "if his purse is well filled with it. But, now, about Duke. Only fancy if he were to fall in love with Cilla!"

"It would not do at all," returns Belhaven abruptly. "If I thought there was any danger of it, I would not let her go over to the Court with us to-morrow."

Dorothea slowly lifts her beautiful white arms and clasps her hands behind her head, in which attitude she contemplates her lord. She says nothing, because it occurs to her that the Scriptures advise one against answering a fool according to his folly.

"I quite understand you," he says nettled, yet, at the same time, irritably conscious of her physical loveliness, "you have but one god. A man can have but one virtue in your eyes——"

"Indeed, dearest love," interposes Dorothea, who always adopts additional endearments when she is the farthest from feeling affectionate, "I should be very glad if he had two. Good temper is a great virtue."

Belhaven flings himself at her feet, and throws his arms round her.

"Oh, my darling," he cries with a sob in his throat, "why do you provoke me when I love you so awfully that every little word you say has power to wound me; when you know it drives me mad even to suspect that you did not marry me entirely for myself!"

When he has calmed down, he and Dorothea approach the subject of Duke and Cilla in a better temper. He gives her excellent reasons why, to think of marrying Cilla at all for the next two or three years, would be unwise for the girl's sake; he points out that, with so sensitive and sympathy-craving a nature, Duke would not be likely to satisfy her affections, and he tries to convince his wife that money would not afford that solace to Cilla's heart which it might do to the disappointed love of some women. Dorothea does not contradict him, though she is mentally pooh-poohing every word he says, and resolving that she will leave no stone unturned to secure so brilliant a marriage for her sister. What Belhaven may say or do counts for nothing. She is much more than a match for him. The real thought that troubles her, and recurs over and over again to her mind is,

"What will Mrs. Beauclerc say?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE Court is a very fine place indeed, and thoroughly well kept up, although its owner is a bachelor. Duke Vereker has a princely fortune, and delights in exercising hospitality. Every season he entertains hunting and shooting guests, and, for four months, keeps almost open house at the Court.

When Cilla arrived there, as a guest, with Lord and Lady Belhaven, she was at first struck almost speechless by the pomp and luxury that met her eyes; for Red Meade, which she had been wont to consider a palatial residence, is a very poor, humble place compared with the Court. Up to the present time, Cilla's knowledge of country houses has been only derived from books: the third room of a small London house, almost squalidly shabby, varied by furnished apartments at the seaside, having given her her only practical knowledge of dwelling-places. Now she felt as though some enchantment were at work, and some such accident had happened to her as followed the rubbing of a lamp, or pressing a ring in the "Arabian Nights" tales. So that when Lady Chester, waiting in some expectation to see the fascinating creature of whom she had heard so much in the last few hours from her brother, beheld her, she was considerably surprised and disappointed

to find a shy, silent young girl, with a rather awe-struck expression in her eyes, and hardly a word to say for herself. Her ladyship devoted herself at once to Lady Belhaven, who, as a beauty and a woman of the world, interested her, and, in contemplation of whom, she was at a loss to imagine how a man could bestow a second glance on Cilla.

Lord Belhaven had driven over early to shoot, and the sportsmen had not yet come in. Duke's collie was lying in front of the fire, and presently came and sat beside Cilla as she drank her tea, and, after watching her for a moment with an interested gaze, put his paw on her arm, and looked at the cake she held in a manner which did not admit of two interpretations. So he and Cilla ate their cake together, and, when it was all gone, she talked to him in a low voice, and caressed his head, and softly rubbed his ears in a manner which he seemed highly to appreciate. The girl was casting furtive glances around her and trying to realise that Duke, whose simple, hearty ways had made her feel so much at home with him, and, indeed, whom she had treated rather patronisingly than otherwise, was master and lord of all this magnificence. For Cilla had those vague ideas about great people and titled people that are indulged in, (and very properly), by simpler folk who do not live in their society, and who imagine them to be not only exalted in rank and riches, but equally so in mind, manners, ap-

pearance, and everything besides. If she had been called upon to picture a Duke or a Marquis, he would have appeared to her a very handsome, stately personage, and to find so great a being an ordinary-looking, perhaps ill-dressed and awkward mortal, would have shocked and pained her. True, Belhaven had not the appearance with which she endowed a lord, but she was so fond of him personally that she forgot to think what he was like. And he was essentially a gentleman in thought, feeling, and manner.

Suddenly the dog pricks up his ears, and makes a bound towards the door. A moment later, it is thrown open, and Duke's stalwart form comes in, followed by Belhaven and Sir John Chester. He greets his guests with the most evident pleasure, and, when he has said a word or two to Lady Belhaven, he establishes himself beside Cilla.

"I thought I should have been here in time to welcome you," he says, looking at her with eyes in which she can plainly read that he is glad to see her.

Cilla is not quite at her ease: she is trying to feel the awe and respect due to his position, and his hearty friendliness makes it difficult.

"We came very quickly," she answers. "It was cold, and the horses seemed to fly."

The dog, who has been paying great attention to his master, now comes to Cilla's side, and rests his head on her knee.

Duke is delighted.

"He has taken to you already," he cries, watching the girl's slim white fingers with pleasure as they pass to and fro over the silky, black coat.

"Dogs always come to me," she says.

And Duke returns with more heartiness than elegance—

"They're awful good judges, dogs are. You must see Jack. I'll send for him," and therewith he rings the bell for the terrier. "That's the gentleman who catches the rats," he adds slyly, "but we're not going to show you that performance, because it might set you against him, and I want you to like everything that belongs to me."

Jack arrives, is introduced, and behaves in a friendly manner to his master's young guest when he has recovered his exuberant delight at being reunited with Duke, and then Lady Chester suggests that Lady Belhaven and Miss St. George will like to see their rooms.

Dorothea is quite pleased that Duke should admire Cilla. She intends to encourage his fancy in every possible way, but she is not accustomed to sacrifice herself, and has the strongest objection to being left out in the cold. Mr. Vereker must perforce take her in to dinner, and she means to make him talk to her. The task is not a difficult one, because Sir John Chester completely monopolises the attention of Cilla, although she has Duke on

her other side. Sir John is a thoughtful man, and an earnest politician. When he was told that he would have to take Miss St. George in to dinner, his placidity was somewhat ruffled. What on earth could he talk about to a raw school-girl!

He was not a little surprised to find himself, mid-way through dinner, discoursing eloquently upon his favourite topics, incited thereto by the most intelligent eyes he has ever seen, and listened to with an interest which must have flattered any man. For Cilla had not only that keen sympathy which made her identify herself, for the time, with the ideas and feelings of her interlocutor, but she had the instinct of patriotism strongly developed, and was deeply interested to hear of anything which concerned her country. Therefore, whilst Sir John lectured and expounded, she listened intently, and had not a thought or look to spare for Duke, who contemplated her with a mixture of chagrin, surprise, and admiration.

"By Jove!" he says to himself, "she is a wonder. Fancy her rousing old Chester up like that!"

Seeing that he is "out of it," as he would say, with Cilla, he consoles himself by talking of her to her sister.

"Yes, she is a dear child, and immensely clever," responds Dorothea, who is in reality considerably bored by his encomiums.

"I suppose you will present her next season, won't you?" Duke asks eagerly.

"I hardly know," returns Lady Belhaven. "You see, we shall still be in mourning, and could not, of course, enter into much gaiety, but I want, if possible, to be presented myself on my marriage, and then I could present Cilla at the same time. But Bel rather objects to the idea."

"I don't see what difference it can make to him," says Duke.

"Poor dear Bel!" observes his wife with a pretty laugh. "He is full of theories. Theories are a bore, aren't they?"

"Horrid," responds Duke. "But you," looking earnestly at the lovely face beside him; "you can talk him out of them, can't you?"

Dorothea shakes her head dubiously.

"I thought a pretty woman could do anything with a man," he proceeds.

"Some men," says Dorothea maliciously, "don't care for pretty women," and she looks so pointedly at Duke that he feels extremely uncomfortable, remembering what he had said to Belhaven.

"Oh," he rejoins in rather a blundering manner; "every man, of course, must admire a pretty woman, if he isn't a fool; but what I said—that is, what I mean is that—particularly if one is not clever one-self, one likes it in a woman."

And he glances at Cilla in a manner which unmistakably points his meaning.

"Of course," agrees Dorothea sweetly.

"What has made Bel take up these absurd ideas about your sister?" Duke asks. "I expect he is a dog-in-the-manger, and don't want to lose her himself."

This speech is not a very happy one, as Lady Belhaven feels, but she lets it pass without apparent notice.

"He has made up his mind that poor Cilla is not to be married for the next three years at least," she says.

"What nonsense!" exclaims Duke. "There's one comfort, however; he is neither her parent nor guardian, so, if she chooses to marry, she won't have to ask his leave."

He speaks with such earnestness that anyone might imagine him to be personally interested in the question of Cilla's marriage.

"Just fancy now," he pursues, his eyes returning to a satisfied contemplation of Cilla—"just fancy her getting old Jack Chester to talk like that! He doesn't care for women—for anyone, at least, but my sister, and thinks it a bore to have to talk to them. But do you see how he's laying down the law? He looks as if he was on a platform, lecturing away to an enthusiastic audience."

Dorothea is a little surprised, certainly, at the way in which Cilla has come out. It is a mercy that she has something to distinguish her from the common-placeness of girls in general, although Lady

Belhaven is still of opinion that cleverness in a woman is only a *pis aller* for beauty.

"Yes," she says, but without much enthusiasm. "She and Bel often talk until my head aches, or I fall asleep."

Here Lady Chester catches her eye, and gives the signal for retiring. In the drawing-room Cilla relapses into shy silence. Dorothea and Lady Chester are talking about mutual acquaintances and social events, and seem to forget her very existence. She takes a book, and, ensconcing herself in a corner, soon becomes lost to everything around her, as her wont is when she reads. It is only Duke's tall figure towering over her that rouses her, and she gives a little start as her soul comes back from the regions of romance.

"How tremendously deep you were in that book!" he says, smiling benevolently and admiringly at her. "Now, do you know, if I were to begin to read after dinner, I should be asleep in three minutes."

"Should you?" says Cilla, gravely, opening her large eyes a little wider. "I cannot understand anyone going to sleep over a book."

"Ah! but you're so awfully clever, and I'm afraid I'm 'only a clod.' There was a book of that name once. I've forgotten what it was about though."

"Are you laughing at me?" asks Cilla, more gravely still.

"Do I look like it?" says Duke, regarding her with a very earnest expression, and she is satisfied that he is not.

"I want to hear you sing," he continues. "Come to the piano, will you?"

"Oh! please don't ask me," cries the girl, and she begins to tremble at the very thought.

"Why, you surely don't mind any of us?" he rejoins, with an accent on the us that implies a very mean opinion of both himself and the rest of the company.

"I never sing before anyone," Cilla answers.

"Oh! but you must! Do! Now won't you, just to please me?"

Cilla is rent in twain. She always wants to please, especially anyone who is kind to her, but she is agonizingly shy of playing and singing before strangers. Once or twice when she has made the attempt, she remembers the most shameful failures.

"Do!" intreats Duke again, and she rises despairingly and goes with him to the piano.

She sits down trembling in every limb; her hands can scarcely feel the notes; she is very white; her lips quiver, and Duke, as he watches her, surprised and pitiful, wishes a thousand times that he had not asked her.

Cilla plays a lame symphony, with several wrong notes, which jar horribly on her sensitive ear, and

make her ten times more nervous. Then she begins her song.

It is painful to listen to her, and in the middle of the first verse her memory goes, and she breaks down lamentably. The tears are positively starting to her eyes; Duke feels an extravagant desire to stroke her small sleek head; to soothe and console her as one would a child. At this moment Lord Belhaven comes up.

"Why, Cilla," he says, putting a kind hand on the girl's shoulder, a familiarity which Duke inwardly resents, "what is the matter? Where is your voice gone?"

"I am so sorry," she murmurs, humbly, feeling terribly ashamed of herself.

"Don't try any more to-night," rejoins her brother-in-law, and she rises from the piano, feeling quite disgraced and miserable.

"I'm going to show you my photographs," says Duke, and he fetches two big volumes, and brings them to the sofa and seats himself beside her. She forgets her humiliation as she looks at the pictures of foreign countries he has visited; birds and beasts that he has shot; his horses, his dogs, his cats, his yacht.

"Oh!" cries Cilla, as she comes to a photograph of a splendid schooner, "is that yours?"

"Yes," he answers. Then, eagerly, "Do you like yachting?"

"More than anything in the world," she says, with kindling eyes.

"I'm awfully glad of that," exclaims Duke, and at that moment he sees his ship with "youth at the helm and pleasure at the prow," both of which allegorical figures are represented in his mind by Cilla. "I can give you some of the best of what you like best in the world."

Every moment that Duke sits beside her, every fresh look that he takes into her clear eyes, increases her magnetic influence over him—it is such a strange feeling that she gives him, a sensation of such blended strength and weakness—physical strength as he looks tenderly at her youth, her fragile form; and mental weakness as he hears her bright, intelligent remarks, and notes the deep, thoughtful expression of her eyes. He wants to touch her; he would give a fabulous sum to put his arm round her as she sits beside him, and yet the instinct which prompts the desire is as different from the instinct which has impelled him to the same action with other women as light from darkness—it is as perfectly pure as mortal feeling can be—it is the attraction of protective power to soft feminine weakness.

It pleases and amuses Duke to see the little flower-like hand lying beside his big brown one on the open book; once he encloses it smiling in his, saying,

"What a little mite of a hand! It is lost in mine," and Cilla smiles back at him unembarrassed, because there is nothing but pure kindness and tenderness in his touch.

Both of them are surprised when Lady Chester, rising, suggests that it is time to retire.

Duke does himself the pleasure of putting Cilla's candlestick into her hand.

"We will go and have a look at the cats to-morrow," he says, as he bids her good night, and stands for a moment to watch her slim figure up the broad staircase. Then, with a hasty stride, he pursues his sister's retreating form down the gallery.

"Good night, Georgie," he utters, stooping to kiss her; then, with some eagerness, "What do you think of her? Isn't she charming?"

Lady Chester hesitates, whilst a faint, deprecating look overshadows her face. She is a kind, amiable woman, fond of her brother and desirous of pleasing him. But she has not discovered anything at all remarkable about Cilla, and is at a loss to account for his extraordinary infatuation.

Duke's face falls.

"You don't care about her," he says.

"She is so young, and seems so very shy," answers Lady Chester. "Perhaps when I see more of her——"

"Yes," returns Duke hastily, "when you talk to

her, you'll think quite differently. Good night again, Georgie."

"Ah!" he says to himself, as he goes slowly towards the smoking-room, "Angie would have found it out before this. Angie, will understand her!" and then a sudden thought smites him, and makes him stand quite still for a moment, and ask himself, "Will Angie understand her? What will she say to her at all? Angie who has never had a rival yet in his heart. A rival, pshaw! what he feels towards this little girl is something quite different; it is——" but Duke fails exactly to analyse what his sentiment for Cilla is.

After breakfast next morning, the promised visit is paid to the stables. Cilla is shown the horses, the dogs, the cats, and is enchanted. If she liked Duke before, she loses her heart to him when she sees how good he is to animals, and how fond they are of him. The dogs fawn with frantic joy upon him, the horses neigh as he approaches them, the cats come and rub against his legs, and he has a kind word for them all. Cilla is a little timid naturally, but Duke is so strong; she feels such a complete sense of protection in his company that she walks up to the horses' heads and pats their sleek necks without the faintest trepidation. With dogs she is quite at home, and caresses them and the cats by turn. She is astonished and delighted at the harmony in which they all live—sometimes a

cat will pretend to put her back up as a dog rushes by, but it is evidently mere pretence. Jack is at his master's heels.

"Isn't it rum?" says Duke, turning to Cilla. "Jack knows all our own cats, and is perfect friends with them; he goes to sleep with his head on one or two of them sometimes; but if a strange cat comes along, he goes perfectly mad, and it has to be pretty quick to get away from him."

Just as the animals welcome their master by blandishments and endearments, so every man in the yard turns a smiling face and shows keen alacrity when Duke speaks to him. Cilla returns to the house enchanted. Duke is becoming a sort of hero to her; not of the sentimental order, but of the grand old Viking type.

The men are going to shoot again to-day. Lady Belhaven and her sister are to leave the Court at noon. Guests are expected, some of whom will arrive by an early train, and, in her deep mourning, Dorothea does not wish to encounter strangers.

Adieux have been made, the men are off for their day, Lady Chester and Dorothea are chatting in the morning-room, and Cilla has wandered into the drawing-room, and seated herself at the magnificent grand piano which stands near one of the windows. She sings away to herself with the keenest pleasure, revelling in the sound of her own voice, which in this fine room sounds better than it has

ever done before. It is rarely sweet and pathetic—as she sings, tears of deep feeling come to her eyes.

"Why cannot I sing like that before people?" she says to herself, with a sense of mortification. "Why should I have disgraced myself so last night when, after all, I can sing?"

The door which was just ajar is pushed suddenly open, and Duke comes in. His face is beaming with smiles.

"I knew it! I knew it!" he cries, in an exultant tone. "By George! what a wonder you are!"

Cilla has risen startled and bewildered.

"You didn't know I was there," he continues. "Just as I crossed the bottom of the first garden, I saw you opening the piano, and I made an excuse to the rest and sent them on, and slipped back myself. And I've been outside the door twenty minutes, and heard all your songs."

He stands over her with a delighted look in his face, as if some sudden piece of good fortune had befallen him.

"I say" (possessed with a devouring desire to give her something or do something for her, which attacks him when he likes a woman), "I wish you would let me give you a dog. You are so fond of them, and you have no pet—it seems such a shame."

"Oh! I *should* like one!" answers Cilla eagerly. "That is if Dorothea would not mind."

"I'll square Lady Belhaven," returns Duke confidently. "Would you like a pug? I know of the handsomest in London."

"Above all things," says the girl, with kindling eyes.

"It's the greatest mistake in the world to say pugs are stupid," pursues Duke. "They're the most intelligent, faithful creatures in the world. I'll send for this pug, and bring him over myself to Red Meade." Then, coming a little closer, taking her hand, and looking at her with quite a new expression in his eyes, he says, "I hope you'll be a little bit glad to see me when I come."

And Cilla, who is as sensitive as an Eolian harp, trembles and feels half frightened, half repelled, as modest young girls unconsciously do at the first symptom of passion in a man. He sees in a moment the effect he has produced on her, and checking himself, says, in his old hearty tone,

"Good-bye. I won't forget about the dog." And then he goes.

As he strides along to join the shooters he has arrived a step nearer to comprehending his feeling for Cilla. He would like to have her here always, there is almost a sense of pain in the remembrance that he will not look into her beautiful eyes nor touch her little hand again for days to come. And then the thought of last night smites him again sharply.

"What will Angie say?"

CHAPTER VIII.

It is nearly ten years since Marmaduke Vereker made the acquaintance of Angie Beauclerc. He was a fine looking, wild young fellow then, of about two and twenty, not long come into his property, with splendid health and spirits, and everything else that can make life pleasant. But on that particular day he was not in very good form, as he would have expressed it—he was in a dilemma; he had made rather a fool of himself the night before.

The fact was that a little burlesque actress of considerable fascinations in her own particular line, who had worn his diamonds, sat behind his horses, and made liberal use of his ever ready purse, had extracted from him more than half a promise to make her Mrs. Vereker. Why not? He quoted to himself a dozen good fellows who had taken their brides from even less select circles, and the marriages had turned out all right—quite as well, at all events, as some of those which society had blessed and approved. And it was sickening the way mothers and chaperons set upon fellows with money; anyhow, he would be rid of their persecutions. He had used many specious arguments to persuade himself that he had really not been such a fool, after all; but he had not quite succeeded in con-

vincing himself. To-night would clinch it—he was going to dine with his semi-betrothed at Richmond.

Is there such a thing as chance? Duke was turning out of Piccadilly when he ran up against a married brother officer. Duke held a commission in the Household Cavalry.

"Come and have some lunch, Duke! We've got one or two pleasant people coming," said his friend.

It was Sunday, and Duke had nothing to do for the next four hours.

"I shall be delighted," he answered, and the two men walked back to Park Street together. At lunch Duke sat next to Mrs. Beauclerc. As far as he knew, he had never set eyes on her until that day; before he left the house, he felt as if he had known her all his life. She was not beautiful—no, not in the very least; but there was some extraordinary charm about her—quite a different sort of charm from that of Miss Lilian Vavasour. He talked to her eagerly—his conversational powers were not, as a rule, extraordinary; but he felt he could have gone on talking to her for ever. When the ladies left the table and the men lit their cigars, he went over and sat by Mrs. Beauclerc's husband, who seemed a very cheery, nice sort of fellow; they began to talk about horses, and were friends directly. And, as soon as they went up to the drawing-room,

Duke found his way again to Mrs. Beauclerc's side. He sat talking to her until she rose to go; the other guests had all departed.

"Let's make up a party to go to the play!" said the pretty hostess, seeing how much Mr. Vereker was attracted, and always ready to be good-natured, as she understood good nature. "Angie, you must come. Mr. Vereker, will you make one?"

Duke gave an eager assent.

Curiously enough they were all disengaged for the next night.

"You must all come and dine here first," said their hostess.

"Won't you come to me instead?" cried Duke. "I can give you an awfully nice little dinner at my rooms. Do come and try bachelor fare!" and he looked first at his friend's wife, then at Mrs. Beauclerc, then at the two husbands.

Everyone was agreeable; the ladies vowed it would be delightful. The hour was settled; the theatre fixed upon—it was not the one at which Miss Vavasour performed.

Mr. and Mrs. Beauclerc and Duke took leave together; he was going their way, he said, might he walk with them? and accordingly, he did, every step of the way to their tiny house close to Belgrave Square. Arrived there, he accepted Captain Beauclerc's invitation to come in and look at the inside of their nutshell, and he stayed on, and had a

brandy and soda, whilst Mrs. Beauclerc drank her tea. The clock struck half-past five; he had only half an hour to get back to his rooms, change, and drive his phaeton to Miss Vavasour's residence in South Belgravia. He must tear himself away.

"To-morrow at seven, then," he said, looking eagerly in Angie's face—"seven sharp. You *will* come. You *won't* throw me over!" (imploringly).

"But I want to come. I am most anxious," she answered smiling, and with the voice that made her greatest charm. Then he told her his number in Piccadilly twice over, and repeated seven *sharp*.

As his hansom rattled over the stones in Piccadilly (it was not paved with wood in those days), he utterly pooh-poohed to himself the idea that he had ever seriously thought of marrying Lilian Vavasour. What! cut himself off for ever from the society of ladies, and associate henceforth with common, uneducated women, of vulgar, boisterous manners. Heavens! what glamour had been cast over him that had caused him to look with pleasure and interest upon such a creature! and at that moment refinement, culture, delicacy, seemed to him the only desirable things in a woman.

If Duke had spent a charming afternoon in society which he had just learned to appreciate, he was doomed to pass a very different evening, To begin with, he was late in calling for Miss Vavasour, who, as a matter of fact, had been expecting him

all the afternoon, and was exceedingly anxious to have her engagement sealed and settled. The moment she saw him she knew that something was wrong—instinct told her that her chances of becoming Mrs. Vereker had dwindled almost to nothing. She tried to conceal her anger, and to rally him, but her chaff set his teeth on edge; her voice, words, demeanour, appearance, everything displeased him. It even occurred to him that it was rather low form to be seen driving a burlesque dancer in his phaeton, and yet, six hours before, he had seriously contemplated the idea of having her beside him for the remainder of the term of his natural life. When he saw her manner of eating at dinner, and observed her stuff her roll into her mouth as if she had been sucking an orange, he thought of Mrs. Beauclerc, who ate with peculiar grace and refinement, and shuddered.

Miss Vavasour tried to bring her lover to reason by flirting desperately with another man, but so far from resenting her behaviour, he was infinitely relieved by it. She drank much champagne, her voice became louder, her repartees more pointed; her cheeks flushed redder through her paint; her bonnet got a little awry. Whilst her right hand neighbour encouraged and egged her on to the utmost of his ability, Duke became colder, more disgusted every moment—the glare, the noise, the loud laughter, the painted faces revolted him—he thought

of a cool, tasteful little drawing-room, and saw a graceful woman leaning back in her low chair, smiling up at him, sipping her tea daintily; speaking in a soft, well-bred voice.

A little while ago he had thought it rather fine to protest that the society of ladies bored him. But to-night!

Well, twenty-four hours would go somehow, he supposed, and then, he should be sitting next that lady he was thinking of; hearing her voice—he would be in his proper place—the stalls, and the actresses would be in theirs—on the stage.

Miss Vavasour, conscious of the failure of her manœuvre, insisted, after dinner, on Duke's taking her into the garden. And there she made him a very pretty scene; reproached, screamed, abused, swore, threatened, and put the final seal on his resolve to sacrifice half of all he possessed rather than make her Mrs. Vereker. He escaped from her at last, and sought the man to whom she had turned her attentions at dinner.

"For heaven's sake, George, go home with that woman! I cannot stand any more of her! Take my phaeton. I will go by train, or a fly, or get a lift from some one."

And, nothing loth, his friend accepted the office, and Duke paid the bill and escaped before Miss Vavasour was aware of his intention.

It was fortunate for Mr. Vereker that the lady

had no writing to show nor any witnesses to bring in confirmation of her statement that he had made her a promise of marriage, so after a great deal of trouble, annoyance, persecution, many threats, etc., Miss Vavasour consented to relinquish her claims on receipt of so extravagant a sum of money that I should be afraid to mention it. But Duke's fortune would have stood a good many assaults, and he spent money like water.

He gave a princely dinner to his guests next night—such an entertainment, in fact, that it was nearly nine o'clock before they thought about the theatre. The two ladies were charmed at the perfect taste in which everything was done, and the pains that had been taken to please them. But, truth to tell, Duke was not imaginative, though he had the best will in the world; he had told his French servant to arrange everything with a view to please ladies, *real ladies*, and Eugène had excellent taste; knew that *femmes du monde* liked what was delicate, refined, *recherché*, beautiful flowers, a table arranged with taste, whereas the greatest attraction that could be offered to women of another world was lavishness, profusion, however coarse, evidences that much money had been expended in the entertainment.

Duke recognised at once the fitness of the banquet for the guests whom he had invited, and Eugène was not only complimented later, but received

still more gratifying testimony of his master's approval.

From that time forth, the Beauclercs became Duke's dearest friends; he could hardly exist without them; their house saw more of him than his own. In due course the world began to look askance at Mrs. Beauclerc; to say very spiteful, disagreeable things about her. When mothers and chaperons saw that well-looking and immensely rich young Life Guardsman always about with the same lady, they decided that she was not a fit person to know; they formed a league, and determined to crush her. They tried their very best, but they failed. You see Captain Beauclerc was devoted to Duke, and could not have too much of his company; voted him the best fellow living, and made him free of his house. Was that husband a fool or a knave? the world asked itself. It determined to put him to the test. It wrote him anonymous letters, showing him certain deductions that were as plain as pike staves; but with the generosity, the chivalry of feeling that becomes a man, Algy Beauclerc put the communications at the back of the fire, and did not even think of mentioning them to his wife.

Meantime, Captain and Mrs. Beauclerc went yachting with Duke in his beautiful schooner; spent a couple of months at his Highland shooting-box, and helped entertain his winter parties at his splendid seat in Blankshire. Very shortly after making their

acquaintance, he left the service and became his own master. The Beauclercs were not very well off; before they knew Duke they had been compelled to forego many pleasant parties and many gaieties upon economic principles. But now, whether it was Ascot, Goodwood, Hurlingham, the opera, Mrs. Beauclerc always saw and did everything in the best possible manner, and Captain Beauclerc had equal advantages; he was invariably of the party. One thing aggravated the world prodigiously—it was that Lady Chester, Duke's sister, and an important member of society, should be friendly with Mrs. Beauclerc and resolutely refuse to see any harm in her brother's devotion to that lady. Lady Chester was a large, fair, placid lady, some five years older than Duke, and quite a *grande dame*. It was so kind of Mrs. Beauclerc to look after him, she said: that was just the sort of friend who was invaluable to a young man—kept him out of so much mischief—really she never saw anyone so improved as Duke since Mrs. Beauclerc took him in hand. Of course the world saw through Lady Chester and sneered. She was a model of matronly propriety, and she and her husband were devoted to each other—it could say nothing on that score. But Lady Chester had children, and would not they inherit all the Vereker property in case of Duke dying without legitimate issue? His father and grandfather had cut off the entail. Since then the value of the pro-

perty had increased amazingly—coal had been found upon it. Lady Chester and her children would naturally be Duke's heirs, if he had none of his own. So, of course, said the world, it was easy enough to see why Lady Chester connived at her brother's entanglement with a married woman—she hoped to keep him from marrying.

When, presently, the world found that Angie Beauclerc held her head higher than ever; that Mr. Vereker gave the most charming, *recherché* entertainments; that his yacht and house were the very pleasantest in the world to stay in, and that, somehow, people were only invited who were civil and friendly to Mrs. Beauclerc, it turned round and swore she was a very clever, charming woman; that there was not a shadow of harm in her intimacy with Mr. Vereker; that it was only natural that, not being very brilliant himself, and so very easy-going, he was glad to have some one to arrange things for him. Was it likely, the world said now, that if there were anything wrong, a woman like Lady Chester—such a nice, manly fellow as Algy Beauclerc—would countenance and connive at it?

One cannot always go by what the world says. The world will sometimes say a man is a woman's lover if she drives two days running on the box-seat of his coach, or sits out three or four dances with him at a ball, and the same world, if it suits its convenience, will see a woman sit on a man's

knee, with her arms round his neck, and swear it is a case of purely platonic affection.

Many women envied Angie bitterly—they watched her like lynxes—they were always on the alert to catch her tripping. They intercepted many a look of poor Duke's at her, but she never changed—her behaviour was always precisely the same to him—kind, friendly, perhaps a shade protecting and maternal. She never exhibited the slightest authority over him; never gave him commands, nor treated him as though he were her property, as women will sometimes do to a man over whom they have ever so little influence. It was he who was always trying to find out what she wished; what would please her; and doing it. What on earth was her attraction for him? women asked each other frantically. She was not a bit pretty—pretty! why, she had not a decent feature in her face, except perhaps her eyes. Then they came to the conclusion at which the sex invariably arrives when a woman is beloved and yet not handsome—*she must be very bad.* That always consoles them. It is a mysterious phrase—it implies an enormous deal, and yet they do not quite know what they imply, or even what they wish to imply. But, unfortunately, there was no evidence of Angie being very bad. She was perfectly ladylike, her manners were particularly well-bred. She did not affect a loose style of conversation, nor permit men to talk before her in a manner that

suggested a want of respect. How did she catch Duke, and how did she keep him? Keep him she certainly did; for years rolled by and found him occupying precisely the same place in the Beauclerc *ménage*, and, if anything, Angie's sway over him and all that belonged to him was greater than ever. Mothers and chaperons gave him up; they had tried to do battle against Mrs. Beauclerc, and had failed; in Duke's own house they had made cabals; had set upon her and tried to drive her out, but it was they who had to retire with loss from the combat. Angie always came up smiling.

"How she fleeces him!" the world said, when it saw in what sumptuous style Mrs. Beauclerc saw everything that was to be seen; when it saw her driving in a Victoria with a magnificent chestnut horse; when it ate the perfectly appointed dinners that she gave, and looked at the wealth of flowers and the costly nick-nacks that decorated her rooms. But the world never made a greater mistake. Duke, like all generous-minded men who care for a woman, would have heaped gifts upon her; would have given her his head, as the saying runs, but she would not take his gifts, or only such as she considered it proper and prudent for a woman to receive, and he had to puzzle his brains for excuses and pretexts delicate enough to confer even these. To accept his hospitality was, of course, nothing—to live on his yacht; in his houses; to go to race-

meetings with him; to occupy boxes at the opera or the theatre of his providing; to receive his hampers of game, of fruit, of flowers. The Victoria, the brougham, the horse were his, it is true; but he had any number of horses and carriages, and he had offered the use of one to Captain Beauclerc for his wife. That was simple enough; they were such friends, and since Fortune had favoured him more than them, they would surely not be too proud to accept a trifling service at his hands. And was he not overwhelmed with obligations to them? did he not lunch and dine for ever in their house? He sent Algy choice wines and boxes of the finest cigars by the dozen—a stranger entering the house would have been puzzled to know whether he was a greater friend of the husband or the wife. He adored their boy—a bright, pretty little fellow—no child ever had so many or such costly toys; it was a mercy that he was a year old when Duke first made acquaintance with the Beauclercs, or Heaven knows what the world would have had to say on the subject. Angie was wrapt up in that boy of hers—indeed, Duke owed a great measure of the regard she had for him, to the boy. When he was four years old, he caught small-pox, and lay at the point of death, and his mother was in an agony of despair. The moment that Captain Beauclerc heard the nature of the disease, he fled the house and London, saying that it was not worth while for both him and Angie

to catch it—besides, if she fell ill, there would be no one to nurse her. So he betook himself to the sea-side in a dreadful fright lest he should already have caught the infection, smoked all day long and two-thirds of the night, and corresponded with his wife only by telegram, thinking that the safest method.

Duke's behaviour was very different. It was with the utmost difficulty that Angie kept him out of the house—twice, in spite of the servants, he had rushed upstairs into the little sick child's room, and it was only by Mrs. Beauclerc showing real anger that she at last got him out of the room and house. After that she would not let the door be opened to his summons, but only spoke to him through the window, in spite of his abject entreaties. He came three or four times a day to inquire, and bribed her maid to come to the area-railings, where he would detain her with a thousand inquiries and messages. And on that day—that awful day—when the poor, heart-broken mother never quitted her darling's couch, expecting that every hour would be his last, Duke was so overcome by the report the girl brought him, that she thought, as she said afterwards, "he'd have dropped where he stood," and could not do otherwise than ask him down into the kitchen. And there he sat, on one of the deal chairs, for an hour, with his arms on the kitchen table, and his head bowed over them; his big frame heaving with great sighs and groans.

Poor Duke! he was as affectionate as a child or a dog—his heart was as big as his body. The cook went quietly about preparing the servants' dinner (folks must eat, even when there's death in the house): and casting sympathising glances from time to time at the poor young gentleman; the footman brought a brandy and soda and put by his elbow, but he was beyond brandies and sodas to-day—the maid had gone back to the door of the sick-room, which, however, she was not allowed to enter. Angie recked nothing of losing what portion of beauty she might have herself in this awful hour, but she would not consent to let her servants run any risk. She and the hospital nurse attended entirely to the sick child.

The cook was preparing an Irish stew, and very savoury it smelt; but after that day Duke could never bear the sight or smell of it: it brought back to him that terrible morning when he sat with his arms on the kitchen table, and his heart full of anguish, thinking that, with all his wealth and good-will, he was impotent to help those whom he loved best, or to offer them the smallest meed of comfort.

Contrary to expectation, little Algy recovered. Then Duke, not even asking leave, took a small house by the sea-side, and thither, without much demur, Angie was persuaded to take the boy as soon as he was well enough. Out of that house Duke was not to be kept by any commands, how-

ever imperative, and there he made himself the child's slave and plaything; spoiled the knees of all his trousers by crawling about the floor, the position in which it most amused Master Algy to see him; became in turn every wild and tame beast in the zoological alphabet; accompanied him when he went abroad in his Bath chair.

It was not a very crowded watering-place that he had selected, and Duke's big form, with the inevitable cigar, in attendance upon the little convalescent, soon got to be well known. It was quite pretty to watch him, all the women said. Such a devoted father never was seen. But one day a town mouse arrived and enlightened the sea-side mice.

"Oh!" he said, with a cunning smile, "that is not the father—that is the rich Mr. Vereker. He is no relation at all—he is the friend of Mrs. Beauclerc."

"Oh!" said the sea-side mice, exchanging glances, and drawing down the corners of their mouths. After that they looked at Duke with increased interest.

CHAPTER IX.

THE years rolled on, and Mrs. Beauclerc, if not a leader of society, was a highly esteemed member of it. The world's tongue had made the funeral-pyre of her reputation, but she had risen proudly from the ashes like a phœnix, and soared boldly into the empyrean of fashion.

Her heart had been disappointed: she turned for consolation to the world, gauging exactly the value to be extracted from it, and quite content with what it gave. People who once looked more than askance at her, and who had done their best to ostracise her, would have been very glad to rank amongst her friends, even her acquaintances now. No one gave such charming little parties—the best men, the prettiest women, were to be met at her house, and Mr. Vereker's entertainments were celebrated. At the luncheons and dinners which he gave in Park Lane, if Lady Chester was not there to preside, Captain Beauclerc always took the head of the table; no particular place being assigned to Angie, though she frequently sat next her host. Duke was never quite happy unless she was beside him—he could not find much to say to any other woman.

Mrs. Beauclerc had become very fastidious about the people she knew, and quietly declined the acquaintance of many who were anxious to know her. She was never rude—she never cut an old friend; but she had a little cold, civil manner to people she did not choose to cultivate, that made her as inaccessible as an iceberg. These people raged furiously against her, and declared that she gave herself the most abominable and unjustifiable airs, but that was hardly true.

"Why should I know people whom I do not care about, and who bore me?" she argued. "How can it be unkind on my part to decline their acquaintance? It is not as if I were a great person—I am no one," said Angie, modestly. "They only want to know me to suit their convenience, and not from any love for me—they want to be amused. What is their money or their rank to me if they are dull and stupid? I do not wish to go to their heavy parties, and I am certainly not going to spoil mine by inviting them."

So she smiled at them with cold courtesy; returned their calls by leaving cards, after a somewhat long interval; declined their invitations, and forebore to invite them in exchange. She never risked a rebuff by seeking an acquaintance, but waited until the advance was made to her—then she received it with graceful cordiality. She detested pushing people.

"If the only way to gain admittance to good houses were by being intrusive and forward, I should remain for ever outside them," she said.

It was not only, however, for the sake of Mr. Vereker's parties that everyone wished to know Angie—she was clever, witty, amusing to her fingers' ends: "the best company in the world," many a man beside Duke swore. She would take equal pains to please members of her own sex if she liked them. She did not, surprising to relate, hate every other woman, and was a warm and sympathetic admirer of beauty, youth, and grace. There never was such a charming chaperon, every girl agreed for whom she had consented to act in that capacity.

Mrs. Beauclerc rather affected the society of women, especially pretty women, and so far from keeping them out of Duke's way, and seeming anxious to monopolise him, she gave them every opportunity of meeting him, and of making the conquest of him if they could. A keen observer might have remarked that all her women friends were of the same stamp; pretty women without very much in them. She never chose a clever one for a companion, nor cared to pursue an acquaintance with one. Now Duke, oddly enough, adored wit and talent, and found but little attraction in a woman who was *only* pretty. Angie sometimes urged him to marry: she would point him out such and

such girls eminently fitted to be Mrs. Vereker, and invite them to meet him, but Duke invariably shook his head, and said,

"I shall never marry. If I did, that is the last woman in the world I should choose. There is nothing in her; two stupid ones together would be a very bad look out for the next generation. And why are you in such a hurry to get me married?"

What *was* there between Duke and Mrs. Beauclerc? Society had asked itself that question until it was hoarse. No one ever doubted what his feelings for her were. Poor Duke! with his honest, blundering, straightforward ways, could never keep his own counsel, and his face betrayed him every hour of the day. Only his face, though, for he never talked of Angie to any one. He was the best-natured fellow in the world, but once or twice, when men had tried to draw him on the subject, they had concluded not to repeat the experiment. It was Angie who was the sphinx—the mystery. No one had ever seen any indication on her part of anything more than friendliness for Duke; her manner to him was always the same—kind, pleasant, a shade maternal. But still her influence over him was unbounded, and the world refused to believe that any woman could gain such power over a man by strictly fair and honest means.

When Duke took that charming house of his in Park Lane, it was Angie who furnished it from top

to bottom, and made it the elegant, luxurious, tasteful place that it was. It gave her the most agreeable occupation; she loved exercising her taste and ordering all these rich, costly things. Whatever she suggested, chose, ordered, was right in Duke's eyes, but she always insisted upon consulting him and having his opinion, and then she made him give the order. She took nothing upon herself. And, with great tact and wisdom, she never interfered with his servants or dependents at his various places. Perhaps her quick eyes detected that he was robbed and pillaged, but she considered that the inevitable fate of the rich. Besides, it could not injure a fortune like his, and she knew him well enough to be quite sure that he would rather be robbed a thousand times than be compelled to detect and punish anyone for doing it. Mrs. Beauclerc, therefore, was always a popular and welcome guest in Mr. Vereker's houses or on board his yacht —she was "a lady who knew her place."

When the house in Park Lane was furnished, it had to be ornamented. Angie had the true woman's love of china and nick-nacks. Some curious clocks and bits of china were brought from his country place, and after that, she used to take him to Christie's from time to time to add to the stock. Duke obediently bought what she advised, though he did not know Staffordshire from Chelsea, or Sèvres from Oriental. He thought it rather a waste

of money: if it had only been diamonds for Angie, he would have been too delighted, but he never hinted that her purchases were, in his opinion, poor value for the outlay. Sometimes, when Mrs. Beauclerc had bought a piece that she particularly fancied, he would declare after it came home that he did not like it, and would insist upon her finding room for it in her own house. This, however, was only a pretext for making her a present of it.

"Very well," she would say, smiling. "I will take care of it until you marry. I daresay Mrs. Vereker will like it."

In this way a great many *objets d'art* came into Mrs. Beauclerc's house and embellished it.

Duke, we know, had a most generous disposition; it was one of his greatest trials that he, being rich, could not give money to the woman whom he loved, and who was poor. Angie would neither accept money nor jewels from him—he dared not even offer them. The only means he had of contributing to her slender income was by winning money for her on the turf, and she was not to be taken in by plausible trickery. If she won, it had to be fairly proved to her; if she lost, she insisted on paying, and Duke, who liked racing for itself, but was no gambler, was at the greatest pains to get good tips on her account, and now and then astonished people

by the intense delight he evinced at winning fifty or a hundred pounds.

"That is always the way," said those who could not read between the lines. "Your rich people are ten times keener about winning their money than poor ones."

With Captain Beauclerc, Duke had less difficulty. When Duke insisted on sitting down to *écarté* with him, Algy was too good-natured to balk him. Duke was a shocking bad player, and did not care for cards. Captain Beauclerc, on the contrary, was a great hand at *écarté*, and invariably won. When they had played for a certain time with advantageous results to Algy, he would throw down the cards and say,

"You are not in luck to-night, Duke. We won't play any more."

Then he would light a fresh cigar and stroll off to the club, leaving Duke and Angie to entertain each other. Duke was passionately fond of music, and Mrs. Beauclerc played and sang with considerable taste.

One evening Captain and Mrs. Beauclerc were dining alone. Angie took the opportunity at dessert of broaching the disagreeable subject of bills. It was always a very hard task to get money out of Algy for anything but his own amusements. He was like many another man, princely in lavishing it out of doors and in the eyes of the world, and a

very niggard at home, grumbling and quarrelling over household bills as if he were not the person who mainly contributed to swell them.

He was not in the very best of tempers that evening, but then he never was when his wife wanted money.

"I *must* have some money," said Angie, half positively, half entreatingly. "I have not paid the books for nearly three months."

"You go to work in such cursed extravagant style," returned her husband irritably, although no one liked good living better than himself.

"I do not think so," said Angie. "Besides, you are constantly bringing men in to lunch and dine, and you would be very much annoyed if things were not nice."

"The tradespeople must wait," growled Algy: (who could have imagined in society that the smiling, *débonnair*, silver-tongued Algy could look and speak so bearishly!). "I have no money, and that is the long and short of it."

"You have had your last quarter's income," replied Angie firmly, "and I *must* have money."

Algy looked across at her with a peculiar glance.

"Why don't you get it from Duke?" he asked.

Angie raised her large eyes to his face and regarded him steadily.

"Ask Duke to give me money to pay our household bills?" she said. "Shall I send in and ask

our next-door neighbour? It would be about as suitable."

Algy gave vent to rather a brutal laugh.

"You are a devilish clever actress, I have no doubt," he said. "Suppose, all the same, that you try your hand on Duke?"

He looked at her with a disagreeable smile, but she kept her eyes unflinchingly fixed on his.

"Do you mean to say," she asked, in a very cold, quiet voice, "that you think I am on such terms with Duke that I can ask him for money, and that under such circumstances you not only permit but connive at it? In that case, the sooner we discontinue his acquaintance the better. From to-morrow I shall forbid him the house."

Algy rose, dashed back his chair, and flung from the room with an impatient oath. He betook himself to his own little room and lighted a cigar, feeling very much perturbed in his mind. Angie was quite capable of doing it—how infernally strange she was! What a dreadful thing a clever wife was! You never could be up to her or know what she was at. What! lose Duke who had made his life so pleasant to him of late: Duke, in whose company and at whose expense he went everywhere and saw and did everything in the best and most comfortable way!

An hour later, Algy went into the drawing-room to look for his wife. He wore the charming, genial

expression with which the outside world was familiar, and, going up to her, he laid his hand on her shoulder.

"You needn't have cut up so rough just now, little woman," he said in the tone which he had used to her in bygone years when he loved her. "I was only joking. Do you think I don't know you, and wouldn't trust you anywhere, much more with old Duke, who's the best fellow in the world? I'll see about the money to-morrow, and let you have as much as I can. I'm off to the Club now. Can I do anything for you?"

"No, thank you," she answered coldly.

He stooped and kissed the top of her head, and then made for the door.

She looked after him. There was a strange mixture of contempt and yearning in her eyes—her lips quivered. When the front door closed with a bang, she threw down her book and burst into a passion of tears.

How she had loved that man! How faithful, how devoted, how loving she would have been to him if in those bygone days he had not worn out her love and patience by his selfishness, his vanity, his indifference!

This is the woman who for nearly ten years has exercised so mysterious and powerful an influence over Marmaduke Vereker; has governed his life,

regulated his habits, and given a general tone to his ideas. He owes her nothing but good; she has been the making of him, as Lady Chester frankly says. She has fostered good and generous impulses in him; has toned down his boisterous spirits, polished his rough and ready manner, and improved his taste in many ways, especially as regards her own sex, and the choice of companions in his own.

To-day Duke is extremely ill at ease; he is like a man who has been walking tranquilly and confidently along a smooth and pleasant road, at whose right hand a new path has suddenly opened, showing glimpses of a magic land strewn with rare flowers, peopled by alluring, beckoning forms. But the end of the vista lies in shadow.

Up to this period no girl has ever made any particular impression upon him; not one has ever given him dreams of domestic joys of which he should be the head and centre. But this slender, fragile young girl, with her large eyes in which there is so much soul, fire, depth; the eyes of the devoted young priestess of some great temple, has disturbed all Duke's heart; put new, troublesome, yearning thoughts into him, made havoc of his calm content as did the taste of the apple with our first parents' peace. If it were not for Angie!

Then his generous heart revolts against his own ingratitude. Has not she been his salvation? Does

he not owe nearly all the happiness of his life to her? And yet, for the moment, a strange new face has almost tempted him to wish that he had never known her. His brain is so busy that he feels little inclination for sport, and, though the sound of shots tells him that his party is not far off, he does not hasten to join it. On the contrary, arriving at a big tree with a bench beneath, he leans his gun against the trunk and sits down to continue his meditations.

"After all," he says to himself, "Angie is always persuading me to marry. Perhaps she means it—perhaps she would be glad if I did!"

But he knows that this reasoning is specious. Duke is a man of the world, and he is thoroughly aware that his marriage means utter loss and deprivation to Mrs. Beauclerc. It is not possible in the nature of things that she and his wife could be friendly—he would hardly even desire it. Angie has ruled him completely these ten years; ruled him with the lightest of hands, and he has gladly obeyed the least touch of her fingers, but if his heart is to own a new mistress, none but that mistress will be able to sway him henceforth—there must be no divided rule. And, of course, people being so good-natured as they are, no time will be lost in instilling false ideas into his wife's or his betrothed's ears about his relations with Mrs. Beauclerc. Angie herself is by far too proud and delicate-minded a woman to allow herself to be placed in the position of a

dethroned rival currying favour with the reigning sovereign.

If it were not for the loss to Angie! the terrible difference in her life that his absence from it would cause. If she would only let him make it up to her! and then he is angry with himself for having conceived so indelicate a thought as the bare idea implies. What! treat her like a cast-off mistress! compensate her with money and gifts for the loss of his affection! As if she, of all women the most sensitive, would not bitterly resent such an affront! If he marries, he knows that Angie will break with him, and so save him all the trouble and remorse; not openly, not with esclandre, but she will withdraw herself from his society and drop into a mere acquaintance. And it is the loss of pleasure and amusement to her which this involves; the loss of his houses, his yacht, the thousand pleasant parties of which she has been the real head and object that distresses Duke and makes him feel it a kind of treason to indulge in the thought of marrying. And then comes the reflection whether it is not rather absurd to be thinking at all about marriage with such a child as Cilla, but he banishes sense and reason with a vehement effort—it is her extreme youth, her innocence, her fragility that exercise so potent a charm over him. A fig for Belhaven! What business is it of his! If he can only get the child to love him! Ah! and he draws a long breath.

That if is a mighty factor in the question. She is not of the sort to sell herself for houses and lands and jewels. So much the more precious her love if he can but win it!

Then he indulges in the mistaken idea of his sex that he will compel her love by his intense devotion. I do not think women ever hold these false ideas—they know that the greatest obstacle to winning a man's love is letting him know the intensity of their feeling for him.

Duke returns home in time to send a letter commanding the immediate despatch of the pug. When it comes, he means to take it over himself to Red Meade in spite of his large house-party.

He is horribly bored all the evening, though he has two or three very pretty, charming women as guests, all on the alert to captivate and please him in the absence of Mrs. Beauclerc. He tries to rouse himself because it is his nature to be kind and a hospitable host, but they cannot help remarking that he is *distrait*, and put it down with some impatience to Angie's not being here.

"He cannot live without her," says one to another. "It is really too ridiculous."

But Duke is thinking of a childish face and figure; of the great, absorbed eyes. What is she doing? he wonders. Sitting in the low chair by the rose-shaded lamp lost in her book? or perhaps singing in her sweet, delicious voice whilst Belhaven sits

at his pretty wife's feet? or, and he does not like the idea so well, deep in some learned discussion with Bel? Or, would it be possible? and his heart leaps at the bare idea: might she be giving one little thought to him, just one faint wish to have him there, to see him again?

"God bless her! little darling, whatever she is doing!" and Duke heaves a big sigh, and his eyes are dim for a moment with his great tenderness for her.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. BEAUCLERC is sitting by a bright fire in her pretty drawing-room. She is leaning back in a listless attitude, her eyes bent on the glowing coals which yet they scarcely seem to see—on her lap lies an open letter. We may stare hard at her; she is too deep in reverie to be disturbed, and we may be pardoned a little curiosity about a woman concerning whom the world has had so much to say.

She is not beautiful—indeed no—not even pretty. Elegant, *distinguée*, if you like; well-bred, well-dressed, that is all, but you may wonder with the rest of society what there is in her to have chained Duke Vereker so faithfully to her side these ten years. Her hair is of the darkest shade of brown;

she has large, expressive eyes; her other features are not remarkable; her complexion is pale, inclined to be rather dark than fair. If you saw her to-day for the first time, you would say without hesitation, "She is not a happy woman." Had you seen her last night, hostess to a cheery party, you would have thought her the brightest, most vivacious creature in the world. When in society you see a very gay, bright-mannered woman, you may always be quite sure there is a reverse to the medallion, and that she passes many sorrowful, gloomy hours at home.

One glance at Angie Beauclerc's speaking face this morning will tell you how far removed from her is any happy or pleasant thought. Now and then her whole frame is shaken by so profound a sigh that it seems to come from the very depths of her heart. Her body is listless, unnerved, but her mind is working with intense, absorbing energy. What can be the subject which moves her so deeply!

She is reviewing the past, the present, the future; her phalanxes continue to march past sometimes in slow time, sometimes at the double—the formation of the ranks is always the same. Somehow, though it is gone, and therefore not to be endured again, it is the past which stabs and hurts her most—it is the disappointment of bygone years rather than the blow which has fallen to-day that tears from her these long-drawn sighs. Shall we travel back with her? it will help us better to understand the Angie

of to-day—the woman whom the world has maligned, traduced, fawned upon, and flattered—it will tell us how far society's judgments are to be relied on, and how the links of the chain were made upon which the world could, naturally, only pronounce as a whole. Fourteen years—it is a long time for a woman still young to look back on—fourteen years ago Angie was a girl of eighteen; a charming, sprightly creature, extremely attractive without being a beauty, and holding sway in more than one manly breast. She, however, had one great misfortune, bestowed probably by some insulted fairy god-mother—she had a heart. When she loved, it was recklessly, passionately, heedlessly—from her youth up, her dreams had been of love, love, always love—when her hero should ride by, she would be waiting for him, and she would follow whithersoever he bade her. And the malicious, heartless jade, Fate, ordained that, to the girl's glamoured eyes, Algernon Beauclerc should appear as the chivalrous heroic being for whom her heart had lain in wait. He was a dashing young cavalry soldier in those days, with curly chestnut hair and blue eyes which promised more fidelity than the owner was capable of. Mr. Beauclerc was much charmed with Angie, who was at that moment the centre of attraction in the country house where both were guests—other men admired her, a sure way to the *heart* of a man of his stamp: and she possessed five hundred pounds a year. The young

people fell in love—only one thing was needed to knit their passion with bands of iron—opposition—and this was plentifully given by Angie's people. No doubt it was provoking that when a baronet with any number of thousands a year was dying to endow her with them, she should take it into her head to love (Pshaw! who invented that sickening word!) an extravagant, impecunious, wild young soldier who was sure to make a most indifferent husband.

But Angie was faithful, heroic, resolute. Mr. Beauclerc got his troop, sold out, and he and his six hundred a-year were mated to Angie and her five—a nice comfortable little income one might think for a couple of devoted young people.

There is not, however, so much spending in eleven hundred a-year as some people might think; especially when the man is extravagant and self-indulgent, to say nothing of his having a little sheaf of unpaid bills to start with, and when the girl has been brought up in the lap of luxury without the faintest idea of how to keep house. But Angie was no weak, foolish, irresponsible creature—she had an excellent head and a devoted heart—if she made mistakes to begin with, she speedily learned to set them right—her management soon left little to complain of. Ah! if inexperience had been all she had to contend with!

It is a grievous thing to lose by death the man whom you fondly love—when thus bereaved, you

think there is no keener agony in all life's plenteous quiver of torments that can assail you; but days go by—the first maddening pangs subside; you grow to do without the dear presence which once was all in all to you—in time you smile; you grow cheerful, you laugh, until one day you wake up shocked to find that it is almost an effort of memory to recall the beloved face; the sayings and doings even of your lost love.

There *is* a crueller pain. It is to love with all the passion and tenderness of which your heart is capable, and day by day to find the veil dropping from your eyes until you know that you have given your love and life unworthily; that he whom you thought true, brave, and kind, is mean, selfish, heartless. To suffer indifference in return for your devotion; to hear from the lips which once breathed fondest flattery cold and coarse and unkind words; to feel that instead of a blessing, you are a burden; to be treated as only a woman can be treated by an ungenerous man, and as he would only dare to treat a wife.

That was Angie's fate.

How did she bear it? Was she a patient Grizel? Could she endure neglect and indignity, and wait until it pleased her lord to change his mood? Alas, no, poor soul! She could have borne misfortune, privation, most of the ills that flesh is heir to by the side of a man who loved and was good to her.

She was brave and true as steel; the things she could not bear were neglect, injustice, harshness. Therefore she rebelled and raged against these in her heart. She deluged her pillow with tears; she made scenes; she reproached her husband, and by that very means made him ten times colder, more impatient, more neglectful.

Her life was a torment, because she still loved him; because she could not, would not see that her ship was stranded, and that she had best leave it, and save what she could before all went to pieces together. She could not yet say, "If he is lost to me, if I am disappointed in him, there are other things in life." No! she must win or compel him back, or she would have nothing else. So eighteen months went by, eighteen months of daily misery and heartache, with fitful attempts at reconciliation, and strivings on her part to bring back the truant to her side.

Most unfortunately, she had fallen into delicate health, aggravated by her unhappiness. Captain Beauclerc was a man who wanted to be amused, and who would be amused. Self-sacrifice was an unknown quality to him. It would never have occurred to him for one instant to remain beside the couch of a sick wife, nor attempt to alleviate her dulness. His sole care was to get rid of his own. Therefore, evening after evening he dined out, leaving Angie to her own sad meditations.

"Why don't you have some woman to come and stay with you?" he said, irritably, when she complained of loneliness. But a proud woman, a woman who still loves, is not solicitous of eye witnesses to her wretchedness and desolation. As for her own people, Angie was perfectly aware that their sympathy would only take the "I told you so" form, so eminently hateful to victims writhing under the bitter consciousness of a cruel mistake.

One of Angie's greatest trials; the source of constantly recurring scenes between her husband and herself was money. Captain Beauclerc attended races; Captain Beauclerc smoked expensive cigars; Captain Beauclerc drank champagne when he dined at his club; Captain Beauclerc wore gardenias in his button-hole; but when he was called upon to produce money for the butcher and the baker, he was fain to pay them with anathemas; to curse them for extortionate rogues, and to swear that he had not the wherewithal to meet their infernal, swindling demands. Though he was in the habit of bringing in men to lunch and dine, and would have been furious had there been only a cold mutton-bone to set before them, he invariably railed against Angie when the bills came in as though he were called upon to pay for her greediness and gluttony. Indeed, men are apt to behave towards their wives over weekly bills as though these unfortunate ladies had *in propria persona* consumed the whole of the viands.

Angie had the most honourable sentiments, and was just and liberal by disposition; debt was abhorrent to her—to be asked two or three times for the payment of a bill was a deadly disgrace in her eyes. Captain Beauclerc, on the contrary, would have chucked his bills behind the fire and gone on spending his ready money on himself until one day, when ruin overtook him, he would have been extremely surprised, not to say indignant.

We may imagine, then, that when Mrs. Beauclerc asked for money, and Captain Beauclerc angrily declared his inability to give it, the occasion was not conducive to domestic harmony. Angie would probably begin in a coaxing manner; Algy would plead utter impecuniosity. Angie, with rising temper, would assert the necessity of paying for what was consumed in the house; he would tax her with extravagance; she would return to the charge, declaring that she felt like a thief and a robber, and that it would be well for him to be honest before he indulged in expensive habits and amusements. This invariably gave him the opportunity of putting himself into a passion and declaring that his life was—the reverse of heaven; that he wished he had never seen her; that people who were paupers were fools to marry, etc., etc., etc. Tableau. Tears from the lady; exit by the gentleman after, perhaps, flinging down a couple of sovereigns on the table with much such an air as the gentleman in the play

throws the purse to the poor Dame aux Camélias. He would then betake himself to the club (the scene having as usual taken place after dinner), would drop into a theatre with a friend, and not improbably help entertain a small and select party at supper afterwards, when somehow money would be forthcoming from that pocket (so empty at home) to pay for champagne and other delicacies. Algy was such a generous, good-tempered, kind-hearted fellow —so said his friends, of whom he had a considerable number.

Angie, however, after a scene with her husband, had no such distractions as the play, or a *petit souper*. She acted her own tragedy at home alone; she had bitter thoughts for food, and salt tears for drink. Then sleepless hours, waiting for the return of the Prodigal, whom, most unhappily for her, she still loved. She knew what he was; she despised him, and yet she loved him—crueller pain than death.

What anguish, what blind rages, what despairing thoughts assailed her! She would leave him; she would kill herself; she would fly to the uttermost parts of the earth. Women of Angie's temperament always go through these phases of violent resolve, and come back crouching from very heart-hunger to sue for crumbs of love from the hand of their tyrant. That is to say, for a certain time. The hour came when Angie, having strangled, and crushed, and killed her love, came to feel for the man she had

adored a cold, calm contempt. She tolerated him; for her own sake she did not care to quarrel with him. He thought her amazingly improved, and they got on "quite nicely." She had her boy now—the love of the child, which brings no disappointment with it. The mother who loves tenderly and wisely need fear no rival, no falling off in the love of her offspring.

It was at this period that Duke Vereker came upon the scene, and made so great a change in her life. Let the truth be spoken. Duke fell madly in love with her. As she sits, these ten years later, looking into the glowing coals, with the open letter on her lap, she is thinking of Duke, and remembering how, in this very room, he sobbed out the passionate misery of his heart because she was not to be moved by any entreaties to return more than a friendly kindness to his love. He would have given her all he had. He had implored her to leave the man who cared so little for her (he was so desperately heart-sick that he had got beyond remembrance of the dishonour he was doing his pretended friendship for her husband). Yet, after all, it was not pretended friendship; for he really liked Algy. Only it hardly seemed to him as though taking from a man something he did not care for or value was robbing him. He would have gladly given him twenty, nay, fifty thousand pounds damages, which he knew would more than have consoled him.

But Angie's heart had grown blank as far as men were concerned, and she possessed that strong instinct of self-respect which prevents some women lapsing from virtue, even under temptation. But in this case there was no temptation. She grew fond of Duke, in a motherly, protecting way; his devotion consoled and pleased her, but love! She, the romantic, passionate young creature of yore, had grown to make a wry face over the word now. She held the world and men in a sort of bitter scorn; it amused her to see how meretricious, how corruptible were the laws of society; how it can be daunted and cowed by a brazen front; how it can tolerate glaring vice, and hound down faltering virtue.

She had given up her hopes of love, but now her eyes were open to see that there were other pleasant things in life—over these her friendship with Duke gave her full range.

And her husband approved; it was he who was for ever throwing open his hospitable doors to his eager young guest.

Bitter was the scorn that curled Angie's lip; she became a cynic in her heart, but she was too clever to show it—the world resents nothing so much as being found out and despised.

Angie *knew* that she would live down the world's calumny; a woman backed by her husband is quite sure of doing that. And she had the knowledge of her own integrity; the day would never come when

her son could look askance at her—the only thing she would have dreaded.

Meantime, she took her pleasure; was envied, caressed; had become a person of considerable social importance, and, having forgotten her heart-hunger, her disappointment, even her bitterness, since life went smoothly with her, was no more than, nor yet half so much to be commiserated as, most of her sex. There was not a shadow of remorse connected in her mind with Duke; he had been distinctly the better for her—her influence over him had been used solely for his good. And, after his first passionate chafings, he had sunk down into the place she had given him. She had become a necessity to him; she amused him, advised him, took care of him; his mind leaned upon hers: he wanted a home, and, where she was, grew to be home to him. Habit chained him to her as it frequently chains a man to wife and home long after passion has died out. Captain Beauclerc was his greatest man friend. Duke had quite forgotten that he had ever entertained a treacherous thought towards him.

To-day, for the first time, Angie fully realises that the chain which she fancied iron was made of cobwebs, and that friendship is but a poor factor when love comes along with his bow and arrow.

And, that we may be fully able to comprehend why Angie is gazing beyond the red embers at the

ruined fragments of her hopes, we will look over her shoulder and read the letter which at this very moment she has begun to study for the fifth time.

"The Court, Nov. —th, 187—.

"My dear Angie,

"Why are you not here? We miss you very much indeed. Lady Chester is of course a charming hostess, but the Court never seems quite itself without you. And, to plunge at once into the subject of my letter, its master wants you, for just now he seems to be disposed to make rather a goose of himself. Imagine that on one of his big days last week, he transferred his duties as host to Sir John and started off in his dog-cart. And what do you think for? Why, to take a pug-dog to a young lady of sixteen for whom he has conceived a strange infatuation. Twice since then he has ridden or driven over to Red Meade (Lady Belhaven's sister is the young enchantress), and last night he confided to me in a sort of vague, rambling, hesitating way that he was (he did not use the term 'in love,' but there was no mistaking his meaning) fascinated by the most charming creature who ever breathed the breath of life. He does not say that she is beautiful; but she possesses something that in his eyes evidently makes beauty a very second-hand article, and she is so astonishingly clever that I almost wonder her friends do not exhibit her in a caravan.

However, when I ventured gently to put a leading question to Lady Chester on the subject this morning, she replied with just the least shade of irritation that she really thought her brother had taken leave of his senses. Miss St. George was quite a child, not pretty; at least not by the side of Lady Belhaven; exceedingly shy, and if she possessed the wonderful talent of which Mr. Vereker raved, she had most successfully kept her light under a bushel during her visit to the Court.

"I only know Lady Belhaven slightly, but she is a thorough woman of the world, and, having made such a good match herself, we may be sure she will leave no stone unturned to catch Mr. Vereker for her sister. Therefore, my dear Angie, as I imagine this sudden passion to be merely a freak born of idleness and your absence, do make it convenient to come down and instil a little common sense into your friend who seems sadly in need of it. Lady Chester was only this morning bitterly deploring your absence from the Court.

"I have not time for another word—we are just going to drive.

"Always your affectionate,

"NINA CLAYTON."

It is part of Angie's nature to take pessimist views of life—she is always prepared for the worst; always expects it. Therefore, having read this letter

over and over again, and knowing that, as Mrs. Clayton is really her friend, there is nothing "set down in malice," she at once bids farewell to the brightest side of her life and plunges into gloomy anticipations of the future, as though Duke's wedding-bells were ringing in her ears and his marriage was a *fait accompli*.

Angie is no intriguing schemer. She is far too high-spirited to dream of plotting to wrest Duke's fancy from him, and she knows that once he marries, the reins will drop from her fingers, and that she will not even make the smallest effort to keep them. She is the last woman in the world to cajole or flatter Duke's wife; to cringe for crumbs when the whole loaf has been hers, and she knows, as a matter assured beyond all assurance, that Mrs. Vereker, let her be whom she may, will be taught to look askance at her as a rival, an enemy, a person to be ousted altogether from Duke's hearth and home. She is fond of Duke. She loves him with an honest affection. He has been the bright genius of her life, without him, and his love and kindness, the future offers a very blank prospect. Then, with a bitter sigh, she thinks of her husband. They have got on "quite nicely" for years; his regard for her has increased tenfold since Duke became their friend. How will he endure going back to genteel poverty; to living on eleven hundred a year, when he has enjoyed part possession of all Duke's thousands?

Then Angie thinks bitterly how all her fair-weather friends will drop off; how, with secret gratification, they will leave her to pay court to the bona-fide châtelaine of Duke's lands and castles; how, since there will be no more little dinners, no pleasant parties, no shooting or yachting invitations to be got from her, she will sink down into obscurity and insignificance. No stepping horses, no races, no opera-boxes: her husband soured and bitter—wrangles over weekly bills, as in the old days! But there is a thought which brings a deeper sting than any of these; it is her boy's future. She had looked forward to his going to Eton. She had always felt sure that Duke would somehow manage this in a way that need not hurt her pride, and, after all, where that idol of her heart was concerned, her pride was not likely to be very stubborn. Duke adored the boy: over and over again, he had spoken of the great things the lad was to do in the future, for which he seemed to hold himself responsible.

But Duke married. Duke with boys of his own——!

At this thought Angie's fortitude gives way. A stifled sob chokes her. She covers her face with her hands.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. BEAUCLERC possessed a strong fund of common-sense, and a very courageous temper; therefore, having given vent to her first burst of despair and gloomy forebodings, she proceeded to review matters with a calmer and more dispassionate judgment. Duke was in love; that was a fact not to be forgotten, or got over, and Duke was a man so desirable from every point of view as a husband, that the probability of his meeting with a refusal was very small indeed. But would he, did he seriously think of marrying a child of sixteen? Few men were more easily bored than Duke; few men stood more in need of a mind to lean on; a companion to amuse them than he—would he not, after the first fascination, the first strangeness of his singular fancy had worn off, find out that he had made a mistake, and be vexed with himself for having made it? And, if he had compromised himself at all, would he not be sure to fly to her to help him out of his difficulty? She wished ardently now to be at the Court. It was her own doing that she was not; she had herself proposed to defer her visit until the middle of December, and now, unless Duke pressed her

urgently to go to them before that date, she was reluctant to offer herself as a visitor. This in itself was a strange new phase; it was the first time she had ever hesitated to say to him, "I am coming," if it suited her to do so. But, up to this time, she had always been so certain of her welcome.

Duke was not much of a correspondent. Since the first days of their acquaintance when his eager boyish scrawl had daily covered sheets of paper until she had pointed out very firmly and kindly to him that these effusions were in every respect undesirable, and might do her serious harm, he had confined his letters to a few brief lines, telling her his movements in somewhat telegraphic style; they, however, almost invariably wound up with, "I miss you awfully. I wish you were here."

This little formula had been absent from Duke's last three letters, and Angie remarked it with a sigh. This made it all the more impossible for her to propose to anticipate the date fixed for her visit. So, with a heavy heart, she decided to wait and let matters take their own course.

Meantime Duke was in a very unsettled frame of mind. He was in that state when a man longs to be always talking about his passion and the object of it, and Mr. Vereker had no one in whose sympathising ear he could pour his hopes, his doubts, his fears. He longed for Angie's sympathy, Angie's

advice, and yet he could not conceal from himself that there would be something indelicate, not to say ridiculous, in confiding his love to the woman who, he had sworn ten thousand times, was the only one he had loved, did love, or ever could love. He tried to make himself believe that she would be glad to hear of his new affection; that, as she had so often urged him to marry, she would be pleased that he at last thought of taking her advice, but he was not able to delude himself; he knew that she would *not* be glad; that his marriage would make a terrible difference in her life, and that there was not one single point from which she would be able to regard it as a desirable event. But he was so harassed by his love that he felt at times, however she might receive it, he must tell her, must talk to her about it. Lady Chester treated the matter quite unsympathetically as a mere infatuation; she would not even speak seriously of it, and turned the subject when he would fain have enlarged upon it. And Duke was not quite in a position to say, even to himself, that he wanted to commit the rest of his life to this young girl's keeping without knowing more of her; without being sure of his ability to inspire her with a love answering his own. What he did wildly desire and long for was to see her constantly, to be with her, alone with her; to persuade himself that she was not indifferent to him—and this was just what he was unable to do.

He had left his shooting-party to take her the pug—she had been in raptures with it—her beautiful eyes had lighted up with pleasure and gratitude; she had said ten thousand things more with them than she meant or even knew. Duke was dying to be alone with her—what can one say with two other people present or even one person, unless he or she kindly and pointedly turns his or her back with a significance not to be misunderstood! But it was perfectly clear to him that Belhaven did not intend him to be alone with Cilla, and poor Duke left Red Meade vexed, put out, feeling anything but friendly to his host. If he could even have had a few minutes alone with Lady Belhaven, he might have spoken to her—women are always sympathetic in love matters, and besides, without flattering himself, Duke could feel tolerably certain that her ladyship would think him a desirable suitor for her sister. But Belhaven never gave him the chance: he remained resolutely with his guest during his entire stay. About a week later, Mr. Vereker, unable any longer to restrain his desire to see Cilla, drove over to Red Meade again.

This time he was even more unfortunate. Lady Belhaven was not well and confined to her room, and Cilla was in attendance upon her and only came down for about twenty minutes at lunch-time. Duke was delighted to see that the pug was already quite devoted to its mistress. After lunch he was half-minded to broach the subject of his admiration for

Cilla to Belhaven, but something in the latter's manner told him his confidence would not be well received—he remembered too what Dorothea had said of her husband's objection to Cilla marrying for some years to come.

So, chafing and irritated, Duke drove away from Red Meade, longing more and more after the girl and feeling farther than ever removed from her. If Belhaven were her father, brother, or legitimate guardian, it would have been different; but Duke only regarded him as an officious meddler. There was no getting away from the fact, however, that Cilla was only to be approached through him, and that if he chose to prevent or forbid any man seeing her, it was perfectly in his power to do so. His only chance was to make the girl so much in love with him that she would consent to his carrying her off, and how was he to do that if he never saw her alone! And Duke, being of a modest and diffident nature, felt by no means sure that he would be able to win Cilla's heart, even though the most ample opportunities for *solitudes à deux* were offered him.

So, at last, worried, restless, miserable, he resolved to seek Angie and to ask her sympathy and advice. In his own trouble of mind he began to forget his scruples of delicacy towards Mrs. Beauclerc —he was not more selfish than most of his sex, indeed not half so much so as a great many of them; but when a man is suffering, whether physically or

mentally, he is a little apt to forget the feelings and the convenience of other people. So Duke argued to himself that, after all, Angie would not mind, or if she did, he could not go on like this any longer as it was simply killing him by inches.

It is about four o'clock on a dull afternoon when Mr. Vereker's hansom dashes up to Mrs. Beauclerc's door. He has taken the precaution of telegraphing his intended advent to her, and therefore feels tolerably sure of finding her at home. A minute later he is in her presence, shaking her warmly by the hand, delighted to see her again, and looking the same cheery, devoted Duke as he has done these ten years. Unfortunately for herself, and for him too, Angie is in a highly nervous, irritable mood. It has been one of those black days with her in which everything goes wrong; days when a perverse fate seems to stand at one's elbow with a quiver full of little worries, which she sticks into one like arrows at every moment. Angie is not feeling well, besides —her nerves are jarred and untuned, a load lies at her heart; the times are out of joint; she sees only wretchedness and misfortune in front of her. And Duke's telegram has added the topmost stone to the pinnacle of her misery.

She had resolved that when they met she would greet him with smiles, with ready sympathy; she would take his news as though she expected and

was charmed with it. But what a nervous, sensitive woman resolves and what she does are sometimes two very different things, and this befalls Angie to-day.

She feels cold, unsympathetic, rather bitter against Duke. She has no inclination to help him with his story; to meet him half way, as she meant to do. She is, indeed, perversely disposed to hinder him; to make it uncomfortable and difficult for him. She is perfectly conscious of the unwisdom of this course; a very smart contest is going on in her heart between prudence and temper; but temper gains the day, and makes her angry, not only with him but with herself, and he, in consequence, has to suffer for both.

Though she compels her features to a smile, her manner is constrained. Duke does not feel himself thoroughly, perfectly at home with her, as is his wont; it is more like coming to call than coming home. And she asks after his sister, of his sport, and a hundred little company questions which remove him further than ever from his happy sense of familiarity with her. He had meant gently to lead up to his confession, but every time he makes the attempt she adroitly turns the conversation. He had hoped she might have some inkling of the truth. Knowing what friends she and Nina Clayton are, he had felt sure the latter would have told Angie something of his confidences. He grows more awkward,

more uncomfortable every moment, but he has come all the way from Blankshire to tell Angie, and he does not mean to be balked. There is nothing left but a plunge. He makes it.

"Angie!" he says desperately, (he only calls her thus in private). "Angie! I have got something to tell you."

"Yes?" she replies, disconcerting him by a look of polite interest as far removed from her usual sympathetic expression as anything can possibly be.

As Duke, however, has flung himself into the water, he must perforce swim. He does it very unscientifically.

"You have often advised me to marry, haven't you?" he says eagerly, with a gaze that seems to entreat her assent.

"Yes," she repeats in a tone that might mean yes, no, or anything else, so totally devoid of sympathy or interest is it. There is something in her throat which threatens to choke her: if she does not preserve the most rigid calm, she has a horrid suspicion that she will lose her self-control and give vent to the feeling of hysteria which oppresses her. It is not that she is in love with Duke; it is not that she is suffering the pangs of a heart which sees all it values reft from it and given to another—it is only a sort of dull, dumb pain which smites her as though everything pleasant in life has gone from her, and she stands solitary and alone in the world: only

a temporary depression which every feather weight goes to aggravate on a day like this.

Duke is hurt, wounded, disappointed. He would like her to show some emotion either of sympathy, disappointment, or anger; he is not prepared for her receiving this overwhelmingly important intelligence as a mere stranger, whose acquaintance he made ten minutes ago, might do.

"I thought," he continues in a deeply reproachful tone, after a moment's pause—"I thought you took some interest in my affairs."

"Certainly I do," she replies with a little pale, cold smile which does not give one at all the idea of a very vivid interest.

Duke rises and takes a hurried turn up and down the room as is his wont when excited. It is rather a difficult, not to say dangerous, feat amongst the numerous small tables and nick-nacks that make Mrs. Beauclerc's room so pretty.

"Pray mind the china!" says Angie quietly.

Duke pauses midway in his wild career and looks fiercely at her. His eyes say with singular plainness, "D—n the china!" but his lips are too accustomed to respect his hostess to utter it.

Angie ignores the look.

"You were saying," she remarks, "that I have often advised you to marry."

"So you have, scores of times," he answers hotly. "Therefore I should have thought that when

I came to tell you that I am thinking of marrying, you might care just perhaps a little to hear about it."

"Of course I care," she returns in the same quiet voice. "Who is the lady? And when is the wedding to take place?"

More mortified than ever, Duke goes to the window and stands drumming on the pane with his fingers. Never in the ten years that he has known Angie has he felt so angry with, so disappointed in her. For a moment he almost thinks of taking his hat, wishing her good-bye and going out of the house. But no! he has a devouring desire to talk about himself, and to whom can he talk if not to Angie! And, besides, she of all people ought to know. To know what! When he comes to think about it, there is not very much to know after all. He is in love, but there is not the faintest shadow of certainty that his love is going to be crowned by success.

If he feels angry with Angie, it is certain that she feels but little better disposed towards him.

"Ah," she thinks bitterly, "they are all alike—utterly, thoroughly selfish. Here is the man who on his knees in this very room, sobbing like a child at my feet, swore his unalterable devotion to me, and it does not seem to strike him that there is the slightest want of fine feeling in bringing his new passion straight to me and expecting me to fall into ecstacies over it."

She does not attempt to help him by even so much as a word, but sits looking a little scornfully at the fire and playing with the diamonds on her fingers. Duke's wrath is gradually melting away—he has had leisure to remind himself that it was hardly to be expected that Angie should feel or show any great pleasure at the news he has brought her. Presently he leaves the window and draws a chair close to her side.

"I suppose," he says rather diffidently, "that when one is saddled with a lot of property, it is a sort of duty to marry. You know," taking her hand and pressing it, "whom I would have married if I could."

Angie's lip curls a little, and she gently draws away her hand without returning Duke's pressure.

"Naturally," she answers, ignoring the latter part of his speech.

"Of course I don't know—nothing is settled—indeed I have had no opportunity of speaking to her about it. Belhaven won't let me be alone with her for a moment," Duke goes on awkwardly, "but I have seen the only girl I ever wanted to marry, for a good many years, at least."

"But Lady Belhaven?" returns Angie. "Surely she would be able to find opportunities for you to see her sister!"

"Oh, she's all right enough!" says Duke. "But Belhaven's a crotchety fellow, you know, and he has

got some ridiculous idea that she is too young even to think of getting married. Why, that is the very delight and charm to me," he cries fervently—"her youth—her innocence!"

Does the wind, hurrying by, guess what sounds it will draw from an Eolian harp? Can one expect a man with not very fine perceptions to know what chords he is striking at random in a sensitive woman's heart?

At his last words, the sob which Angie has been doing stern battle with ever since Duke entered the room, rises to her throat, and with a sudden, passionate gesture she bursts into a flood of tears. Duke is distracted. He is on his knees beside her in a moment, uttering every soothing, endearing word that he can think of. He sees it all now. Oh, why did he not know or guess before how much she loved him! How perverse is Fate only to let him discover it too late!

And Angie, in the midst of her irrepressible outburst of emotion, reads his thoughts so plainly from his words that she is seized with a hysterical desire to laugh at the ludicrous point of the situation. She is furious with herself, besides, for having behaved in such an utterly tactless, foolish manner; more like a silly school-girl than a woman of the world. Presently she makes a mighty effort, checks her sobs, releases herself from Duke, and, standing at a little distance from him, says hurriedly,

"Don't take any notice of this! I have been a good deal worried to-day. Go down into Algy's room for ten minutes, and smoke a cigarette. I will run and bathe my eyes. You will find me all right when you come back."

And with a nod and a smile she leaves him.

Duke feels no inclination to smoke just now. He stays where he is, and, dropping into the chair vacated by Angie, proceeds to ruminate.

"Poor little woman!" Ah! what a change in a man's heart it tells of when his divinity, his sovereign, his queen, comes down to be apostrophised as "Poor little woman!" He will never give her up. No, not for fifty wives. She shall always be his best, his dearest friend. It shall be part of his marriage contract that Angie shall have her place in his heart and home. The judicious reflections which Duke has previously made as to the impracticability of such a scheme vanish into thin air for the moment. They will return later, but, just now, his heart speaks louder than his common-sense.

Barely ten minutes have elapsed before Angie trips in, the old, smiling, friendly Angie whom he has known so long.

It has grown dusk. No one need know that she has been crying.

"I must tell you, my dear," she says in her own bright voice, laying a friendly hand on Duke's arm, "that I have had a heap of little worries to-day.

My nerves were all unstrung. When you came in, I was on the point of having a crying fit. You staved it off for a little, but it was bound to come. I am dreadfully sorry to have inflicted it upon you, but it has done me all the good in the world. And now, I want to hear about your charming little friend, and your future plans and prospects, and in short—everything."

Duke looks at her a little bewildered. This is a very clever bit of acting certainly, but it does not take him in. He will be most careful not to hurt her feelings; not to say too much about her rival.

But, after all, poor fellow, he is but as wax in Angie's fingers; in half an hour she has drawn every thought and wish of his heart from him—he has not kept one secret in the world from her.

His face is eager and smiling; this long talk about himself, his hopes and fears, has done him an immense deal of good—there is no one like Angie.

Angie listens with sympathetic looks and gestures. There is no outward sign of the growing feeling of coldness, of loneliness, of friendlessness that is creeping to her heart. She has never loved Duke, it is true, in the sense in which the word is oftenest used, but he has given her most of the pleasure and happiness she has enjoyed in her life.

And now she is to lose him. For, let him make

what protestations he will, she knows well enough that Duke, married, will never again be friend to Angie Beauclerc.

CHAPTER XII.

And Cilla! What were her ideas on the subject of Mr. Vereker and his attentions? With a heart like hers, passionately eager to give and receive love, was it likely that she would be unable to read the symptoms of passion so openly revealed by Duke's words and glances?

Grown-up people, even in spite of their own experience, will persist in looking upon girls of fifteen and sixteen as mere children with utterly undeveloped ideas about love, and an utter incapacity to feel it; a girl's love is spoken slightingly, smilingly of as "a childish fancy;" the idea that it is keener, stronger, more intense, more exacting, more passionately jealous than that of a woman of five and twenty would be contemptuously pooh-poohed by them.

Yet so it is. There is in a girl's love the strength of freshness, of ardent belief, a hopefulness as yet untarnished by disappointment, and there is the natural and scarcely blameable selfishness or perhaps self-consciousness of youth which is apt to make itself the pivot on which everything turns.

It was only natural that Cilla, after her joyless, unloved childhood, should be prone to regard the first man who showed her admiration and attention, who flattered her vanity and her sense of importance, as something like a hero. A girl of Cilla's disposition lives so much in dreams and romantic imaginings that the less she sees of the man whom she has set up to worship (if he be like Duke, rather a prosaic sort of person), the more influence he is likely to get over her mind. The man upon whom Cilla actually bestowed her first love was no more the real Duke than was his home-spun shooting-coat the gilded armour which Cilla's fairy princes invariably went about in. She could read with delight of tender or passionate love-makings, but her sensitive and delicate nature would have shrunk terrified into itself if Mr. Vereker had proceeded practically to illustrate them. She was quite content with the occasional sight of him in company with other persons, and felt no ill-will at all to her brother-in-law for putting obstacles between them. The young girl who has not been fed on worldly maxims thinks of the lover, not the husband—marriage is the final end of love-making and worship in her eyes—not the prelude to it.

Lord Belhaven and his wife had had more than one discussion on the subject of Duke's feelings and intentions—their ideas, however, were diametrically opposed. My lord maintained that it would be

doing a positive wrong to Cilla to allow him to approach her with words of love. My lady considered that to let such a golden opportunity slip would be an act qualifying the perpetrator for instant admission to Hanwell.

"What can the child know about love!" said Belhaven warmly. "Mewed up in a school-room all her life, filling her poor little head, when she got the chance, with a lot of romantic rubbish, why, of course she is ready to make a hero of the first man who says a civil word to her. Duke is a good, honest, well-meaning fellow, but he is the last man to satisfy a nature like Cilla's."

"He could satisfy something better than her nature," observed Dorothea drily—"she would be the most fortunate girl in the world."

"Oh, Cilla, is not like—" you, he was going to say, but checked himself and substituted "some women." "Diamonds and fine houses are not her *summum bonum* of the world's delights."

"That is because she has had no experience of them," returned Dorothea. "Cilla is just as fond of smart frocks and making herself look well as anyone else."

"That comes from the love of approbation inherent in every nice-minded woman," said Belhaven. "What I say is that she would not set the greatest value on worldly prosperity, but would think a great deal more of her affections."

"Anyone might be fond of Duke," exclaimed Dorothea. "Why, what can you possibly have against him?"

"I have nothing against him," retorted Belhaven with some impatience, "but I want the child to have the opportunity of seeing other men before she is asked to make up her mind about one. She has plenty of time before her. Pshaw! the idea of thinking of letting her marry at present is utterly absurd. I shall take care Duke does not get the chance of saying anything to her—if he attempts it, I shall tell him my views at once, and I shall think it my duty to talk very seriously to her too."

Dorothea felt provoked, but she was not given to contention and argument, so she said lightly,

"I think we are doing something very like counting our chickens before they are hatched. Wait till Angie Beauclerc appears on the scene—I don't imagine we shall see very much of Duke after that."

"So much the better," replied Belhaven.

Dorothea had no intention of quarrelling with her husband, or of defying him openly on Cilla's account, but she considered it a positive duty not to let Duke slip through their fingers, and her great anxiety was to get him to commit himself by a declaration before Mrs. Beauclerc arrived. And first, though Belhaven had particularly desired her not to broach the subject to her sister, she, regarding the

marriage vow of obedience as an absurd, obsolete, and meaningless form, took the opportunity of sounding Cilla the day after Duke's last visit. Her husband had gone shooting. She and Cilla were sitting over the big wood-fire in the morning-room.

"I am sorry I did not see Duke yesterday," remarks her ladyship.

Cilla, hearing her sister's voice, raises her eyes from her book.

Dorothea repeats her remark.

"He is such a nice fellow," she adds.

"Yes," responds Cilla with great cordiality.

"I suppose," proceeds my lady, with a pleasant little smile, "that you are the object of attraction. He comes to see you."

A faint colour rises to the girl's cheeks, a smile to her profound eyes: proofs that she admits the soft impeachment.

"It is very——" Dorothea was about to say "wonderful," but changed it into "nice, that he should have taken such a fancy to you. Such lots of girls have tried for him. Of course one does not know that he has any serious intentions, but one might soon find out, if Bel were not so tiresome."

Cilla is a little embarrassed to know what to say. She stoops, and lifts the pug, (Duke's gift), from the rug, where he lies crouched at her feet, and kisses his satin ears, and puts his soft, black muzzle against her cheek.

"Would you not like to be Mrs. Vereker?" says Dorothea pleasantly. "Duke is ten times as rich as Bel. You would be a much greater person than me, though you would not have a title."

A smile dimples Cilla's cheeks. She cannot help being a little flattered by her sister's words.

"If Bel would only let him speak now," proceeds Dorothea, half frightened at her own temerity, but buoyed up by the consciousness that she is doing her duty to her sister. "When Mrs. Beauclerc comes, your chance will be gone."

"Mrs. Beauclerc!" and Cilla opens her large eyes to their full extent, and fixes them on Dorothea's face.

Lady Belhaven feels slightly provoked. Cilla causes her perpetual annoyance by her stupid innocence; her want of intuition in worldly matters. It is so horrid to have to enter into explanations, and in society, a word, a glance convey things which it is difficult to say out-right. But Cilla is transfixing her with those great, embarrassing eyes, and she must perforce make an effort to explain.

"Mrs. Beauclerc is—is a great friend of Duke's —at least she has immense influence over him."

"I remember seeing her with him in the Park," interrupts Cilla, "the Sunday that you were first engaged to Granville. Colonel Lynn pointed her out to me. I admired her very much."

"I do not know what there is to admire in her,"

returns Dorothea with some shortness, "except that she dresses well. I never could see anything in her. She isn't a bit good-looking. No one can imagine why Duke should be so infatuated about her. She is a horrid, designing creature, and once she comes here, you will see no more of him."

"But," says Cilla, looking mystified, "I thought she was married."

Dorothea pauses for a moment to wonder whether her sister's innocence is real or assumed. Then she says, with a shade of impatience,

"Oh, yes, she has a husband, or of course Duke would have married her long ago. But she has Duke entirely under her thumb—she is poor, and she makes use of his money and his belongings as though they were her own, so of course, you see, she would not let him marry because it would be her ruin."

"But," says Cilla, "I suppose he might still be friends with her even if he did marry."

Lady Belhaven is on the verge of losing her temper.

"Look here, my dear," she remarks, sitting up in her chair and speaking with unwonted quickness, "I am not going to enter into explanations—if you don't understand me, it is not worth while to enlighten you, but remember this: Mrs. Beauclerc is your deadly enemy, and though she might smile and fawn upon you and seem devoted to you, she

would be all the time undermining you and leaving no stone unturned to get Duke away from you. She is a most dangerous woman, so now I have warned you."

A frightened look has crept into Cilla's eyes. Has she not over and over again read of the wicked, serpent-like women who have come between the hero and heroine in her romances!

But, all the same, Duke is invested with a new interest in her eyes, and she is more than ever disposed to regard him as the lover of her dreams.

It is ten days after this conversation when Mr. Vereker pays a visit to Red Meade. This time, Fortune favouring him, permits him to steal a march on Cilla's self-constituted guardian. He arrives soon after noon and finds the girl alone in the morning-room, buried in the big chair by the fire just as he had seen her first. Duke's heart beats nervously—the sensation is a very unusual one for him—his nature is placid, and things have gone smoothly with him of late years. To-day he is moved by more than one emotion. There is the keen pleasure of seeing Cilla again, and there is the feeling that his time and opportunity have come; that he is going to take the most important step in his life, and that he is defying Belhaven. For what he does he must do quickly—he may only have one minute in which to tell his love what he feels for her. This is unfortunate for him—haste and ardour

are not the qualities with which it is suitable to approach a sensitive and innocent young maiden—they are, on the contrary, quite certain to repel and alarm her. But Duke is like a boy snatching at a flower whilst the gardener's eye is momentarily averted.

Even as the door closes on the servant he takes her hands and says, in a voice of whose intensity he is not conscious,

"I am so awfully glad to see you again. I have thought of nothing else since I was here last."

Cilla who, a moment ago, was calmly reading in her big chair, feels something as a traveller sitting on a summer day by a placid mountain stream might do on raising his eyes and beholding an avalanche impending. Her breath is taken away; her heart stands still—she experiences a feeling of terror, a desire for flight. That Duke should love her and want to marry her has been a perfectly acceptable idea to her imagination, but the passionate haste of this declaration is as disagreeable to her as it is unexpected. He, however, being animated by the feeling that he must seize the opportunity whilst it is his, does not take warning by the expression of surprise and alarm in her eyes, but hurries on.

"Tell me, darling, that you have thought a little about me," and he stoops, and essays to put one arm round her.

But in an instant she avoids him, and runs to the other side of the table, where she stands trembling, and regarding him with eyes that express anything rather than love or pleasure. Upon which Duke wakes to a horrible consciousness that he is a fool and a brute. It would never have entered his brain to behave in this way if he had not been goaded by the fear of losing his only chance. He calms down in a moment.

"Did I frighten you? I'm so awfully sorry. What a brute I am! I forgot myself for a moment. I was so glad to see you."

These disjointed sentences he pours out in the most humble and penitent tone.

Poor Cilla is intensely embarrassed; a little bit ashamed of herself, and conscious of a poignant regret that Duke should have caused this feeling of repulsion in her.

"Won't you come back to your chair, and let me talk to you?" he says entreatingly. "I promise not to forget myself again."

Thus urged, Cilla, with down-cast eyes, comes from behind her bulwark and resumes her seat by the fire.

"Good Heavens!" exclaims Duke, seeing that her hands are trembling, "is it possible that I have frightened you? I shall never forgive myself. I only wanted to tell you," trying to make his voice as matter-of-fact and unloverlike as possible, "that I

love you with all my soul, and that I want you to try and care a little bit for me. Do you think," wistfully, "you ever might?"

Poor Cilla is desperately disconcerted at being unable to answer him in the affirmative. At this moment she feels that his presence is the reverse of agreeable to her, and that it would be impossible ever to feel any emotion of love for him.

"I do not know," she utters in a low, embarrassed voice.

"But you will try, won't you?" he entreats.

Fortunately for Cilla, she is saved the necessity of answering, by the entrance of her sister. Dorothea would not have broken in upon a *tête-à-tête*, from which she hoped great things, only that, from her window, she had seen her lord coming up the drive, and knew what disgrace would befall her if he came in and found Duke and Cilla alone together.

Under the circumstances, Lady Belhaven's appearance was a relief to both, especially to Cilla, who, protected by the presence of a third person, began to recover her equanimity, and to feel more friendly towards her would-be lover, and rather vexed with herself.

Belhaven, not knowing that the mischief had been done, greeted Duke pleasantly enough, although he was not particularly rejoiced to see him.

Lunch went off cheerily. Duke was fast forgetting his rebuff, and Cilla her shyness. The man's

love and admiration were gradually ripening in the presence of his child-love. The child herself had a little sense of importance and pleasure in thinking of her conquest. Duke, as he looks at her, tells himself that it was natural she should have been surprised and frightened; that her behaviour did not prove dislike or repugnance to him. He is quite bent on winning her. Before he leaves the house he will have an explanation with Belhaven. And, no sooner has the door closed upon the ladies, than he plunges into his subject.

"You guess, no doubt, why I come here so often, Bel," he says. "I am in love with your sister-in-law. I want to marry her."

Lord Belhaven's face instantly assumes an expression the reverse of encouraging.

"Really, my dear Duke," he replies, with extreme coldness, "your declaration is so very premature that I scarcely know how to receive it with any approach to seriousness."

"How premature!" cries Duke, bracing himself for battle.

"How premature?" repeats Belhaven in a slow, measured voice. "Cilla is sixteen and a half; a child who, but for accidental circumstances, would now be in the school-room—there can be no question of her marrying at present."

"I do not see that at all," says Duke with warmth. "Lots of girls are married at seventeen."

"More shame for their parents," returns Belhaven curtly.

"Pardon me, Bel," proceeds Duke. "I don't see exactly that it is a question of your opinion. Miss St. George will shortly be, if she is not now, of an age that is considered marriageable by the laws of the land, and if a man wishes to marry her, against whom you can bring no valid objection and she consents, I don't see that you have the smallest shadow of a right to interfere."

"I have a valid objection," remarks Belhaven quietly.

"If you mean—" cries Duke hotly, jumping to the conclusion that his friend is thinking of Mrs. Beauclerc.

But Belhaven interrupts him.

"Let me tell you what I do mean," he says. "It is the simpler way."

His dogmatic tone irritates Duke intensely—he had never known before that the fellow was such a confounded prig.

"My objection," proceeds Belhaven, "is that Cilla has never had the opportunity of seeing much of any other man but yourself, and that she is therefore absolutely incapable of knowing whether she cares for you or not."

"That is just her charm," cries Duke. "The very fact that she has not been hawked about like other girls or had men making love to her——"

"That may be her charm for you," returns Belhaven drily, "but, you see, I was thinking about her."

"I should worship her," says Duke. "I would do everything a man could do to make his wife happy. I would devote myself entirely to her, and I suppose my position and fortune give me the right to feel that, when I ask a girl to marry me, I am not committing a very presumptuous action."

"Oh," answers Belhaven, "I am quite aware that almost any girl you could ask would be ready to jump down your throat, only, you see, Cilla happens to be different. Don't mistake me, my dear Duke," as it occurs to him that he is not treating his guest very considerately. "I know you are a thorough good fellow and would do your best to make a woman happy, and I know too that you are doing my little sister-in-law an honour by wishing to marry her. But she and I have been thrown a good deal together: I have studied her character: she is exceptionally sensitive and affectionate: to be married to a man whom she could not give her whole heart to would be a sort of death in life to her. And don't you think, yourself, it would be very unfair to her to take advantage of her youth and ignorance, and to try to bind her to you by a promise before she has had any real experience of life, or any opportunity of knowing what love is? Poor little girl! her head is brimful of the most

romantic ideas now: before she settles down, she ought to have the edge taken off them by some contact with a 'work-a-day world.'"

Duke does not see the force of the other's reasoning. A man, with even as little conceit as he has, does not like to have it hinted that he is incapable of satisfying the heart of the woman he is in love with. He says rather sulkily,

"If you persist in refusing to give me the chance of seeing and being alone with Miss St. George, I hardly see how I am likely to make any way in her affections."

"You shall see as much as you like of her on one condition," answers Belhaven. "If you will give me your word of honour not to make any declaration to, nor to extract any promise from, her before she has been into society and seen something of the world, I——"

"I will not promise anything of the sort," cries Duke hotly. "And I think your interference is altogether unjustifiable, and that you are standing in your sister-in-law's light, for which one day she may not be disposed to thank you."

"I will take the responsibility of that," returns Lord Belhaven stiffly.

Whereupon Duke, in high dudgeon, desires that his buggy may be brought round, and quits Red Meade without even proposing to take farewell of

the ladies. He is, indeed, too hurt and angry to feel himself fit company for them.

When he is gone, Lord Belhaven is considerably exercised in his mind to know whether he has acted wisely in sending Cilla's lover about his business. After all, Duke is such a good fellow, and would probably make so excellent a husband, to say nothing of his being a brilliant match. Suppose Cilla, with the perversity of romantic young girls, should take a fancy to some good looking *vaurien*, without a shilling, who would break her heart.

How angry Dorothea will be! And Cilla! Will she thank him for his brotherly solicitude? At all events, he must tell her what has happened. So he rings the bell, and desires the servant to ask Miss St. George to be kind enough to come to him. Cilla enters with rather an embarrassed air. She conjectures well enough the subject upon which she is about to be interviewed.

"Cilla," says Lord Belhaven, taking her hand, and speaking in a tone as gentle as a woman's. "I hope, my dear little girl, that you will not be vexed with me for what I have done. You see, I am responsible for bringing you out of the schoolroom before your time, am I not?"

"Yes," answers Cilla, showing him by the expression of her eyes that she is not unmindful of what she owes him.

"In my opinion," continues Belhaven, "you are

too young yet to think about marriage. I have told Duke so. He is very angry. I hope you are not so too."

"Oh, no," replies Cilla quite eagerly.

"You would rather see a little more of the world, and of other men before you bind yourself to an irrevocable compact, would you not?"

"Yes," says Cilla. "Mr. Vereker is very kind. I—I like him very much, but——"

"But what?"

"I don't want to marry anyone."

So that was all Duke accomplished by his undue haste.

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE days have passed since Duke, angry and discomfited, shook the dust of Red Meade from his shoes. Mrs. Beauclerc is at the Court: she arrived there with her husband just in time to dress for dinner. To-morrow a fresh relay of visitors is expected: to-night the party numbers four, and is composed of the host, Angie and Captain Beauclerc, and the Honourable Cecil, commonly called Cis, Deerbrook. Duke has purposely arranged this: he wants to have Angie to himself for one evening that he may pour his complaint into her ear. For now the ice is broken, now she knows his hopes and fears, he may say unreservedly all that is in his heart: he tries even to persuade himself that she thoroughly sympathises with his new passion. Never has he been more glad to see her arrive at the Court; never has his welcome been warmer nor heartier, but it has not deceived Angie.

Dinner is over; she has left the three men; Duke has whispered to her that he will join her immediately, for the party has been too small to admit of his indulging in any confidences during dinner.

With a sad heart and a lingering eye Angie crosses the splendid trophy-hung hall and saunters down the corridor to the cosy little boudoir, where, when the party is small, guests at the Court sit in the evening. Will she ever come here again or is this her last visit? Never, since she first entered it ten years ago, has the Court possessed such a charm for her; but then, which of us values a thing thoroughly except when we first acquire or are about to lose it! To-night Angie's heart being full of pensive forebodings and regrets, she looks sadly and yearningly about her, every object being invested with a new-discovered charm. How long will it be before her doom is sealed; before she and Duke will have parted only to meet again as mere acquaintances? Some day, perhaps, he will be taught to look upon her with cold and jaundiced eyes; Duke, who once thought everything she said and did perfection. Now his heart is set on another; his eager praise, his admiration are for the sayings and doings of a stranger—small wonder that it is bitter to Angie. "What man was ever faithful!" she says cynically to herself, forgetting that she has no actual claim to Duke's fidelity—"it is only a dog who loves you with unchanged affection whether you are rich or poor, sick or well, young or old, ugly or beautiful!"

She occupies her own seat by the chimney corner; her feet are placed on her own particular

stool in front of the fire. Her eyes are closed, she leans back in her chair: so still she is one might imagine her to be wooing slumber. But her brain is busy; she sees the room and every object in it: she sees more than is actually there, for Duke is, in her fancy, sitting opposite; and, in this chair, not she but Duke's young love reclines.

The door opens briskly and her host comes in. An eager smile is on his face; a look of thorough relief and pleasure.

"Now," he says, drawing a big chair close beside her, and flinging himself into it. "Now we can have our talk."

He says it in the joyous tone of a man who has circumvented chaperons, and managed a meeting alone with his love. And a stranger would think the illusion complete, to see him catch Angie's white hand in his, and imprint a warm kiss upon it. But Angie, trying valiantly to repress the bitter feeling in her heart, is perfectly aware that she is simply a vicarious object of Duke's joy and affection. His pleasure is entirely selfish, and has no reference whatever to her. He has come to talk of himself and his passion; the two delightful themes which men never fail to inflict on a woman whom they like, and which few women would ever have the cruelty or the selfishness to inflict upon a man. Perhaps women are shrewd enough to conjecture what the result would be if they did. After five

minutes, the man would yawn, in ten he would try to change the conversation, in fifteen, if he had not succeeded, he would be gone.

Angie has by this time got herself into perfect training: there is no fear of her breaking down, or giving vent to symptoms of pique, jealousy, or disappointment, however much Duke may rave of the charms and graces, the youth and innocence of his love. She is braced to listen, nay, to listen sympathetically as long as it may please him to hold forth on that subject of inexhaustible delight and interest (to him).

She smiles. Whether her expression be counterfeit or genuine, he pauses not to ask, but plunges at once into his confidences.

"I've been dying to talk to you," he says. "I got away as soon as I could after giving Algy and Cis two of the biggest cigars I could find. They'll take an hour to smoke at least."

"But you," smiles Angie, "what will you do without yours?"

"Oh, I don't care. I can do without. It's much more to me to be able to come and talk to you than to smoke the best cigar in the world."

Angie takes the compliment for what it is worth.

"And how goes on your suit?" she asks. "Does Lord Belhaven show signs of coming round?"

Duke is very good-natured: it is rare to hear him say a word against anyone, but on this occasion

Angie's remark opens the flood-gates of his anger, and he pours forth no measured abuse of the owner of Red Meade.

"He is a pompous ass and a prig!" he cries. "What on earth business is it of his! Just simply a fussy love of interference and of showing power. What is it to him? This time last year he had never set eyes on my little darling, and now he behaves as though she were his own daughter or sister, whom he had nursed and watched over from her cradle."

"But, my dear Duke," interposes Angie gently, "you must surely admit, yourself, that there is some reason in what Lord Belhaven says. Sixteen and a half is too young for a girl to think of marriage, or to be able to make up her mind about a man."

"I don't see that at all," says Duke hotly. "In other countries, girls often marry before sixteen. And I should think she has a much better chance of happiness in liking one man and sticking to him than by frittering her heart away in a dozen flirtations, like girls in society do here. And I suppose," with rather an injured air, "there's nothing about me to make it impossible for a girl to fancy me?"

"On the contrary," returns Angie softly. "But, if your heart is so set on Miss St. George, why do you not accept Lord Belhaven's conditions for the present—say for the next six months?"

"Six months!" cries Duke. "What! to be con-

stantly in the presence of the creature you adore, and not to be able to tell her what you feel; to be always holding yourself back! It's impossible. I couldn't do it. I would not attempt it."

If he had intended to practise any reticence before Angie, he has thrown it to the winds now. It is such a comfort to have some one to talk to without reserve. And Angie, if any feeling of bitterness or mortification creeps into her heart, stifles all show of it in her face, and looks at him with the expression of interest and sympathy which he expects and demands of her.

"But," she urges, "if you do not make some concession to her brother-in-law's wishes, you will not be able to see her at all. You left Red Meade in anger, you say—if you went there again without being ready to give some such promise as Lord Belhaven requires, how can you meet him? What have you to say?"

Duke, being unable to reply to these questions, launches again into bitter invectives against Belhaven.

"You forget," says Angie presently, with a faint smile, "that you want me to see Miss St. George, and that I am anxious to meet her. How is it to be accomplished, if you do not come to terms with her guardian?"

"Ah!" utters Duke, and then he sits for some

minutes, ruminating deeply, and regarding the glowing logs on the hearth.

Angie does not interrupt him. She is pursuing her own meditations in silence. What strange changes time brings! Had she ever dreamed of or forecast this evening when she would be sitting here in this very room, listening to Duke's raptures and despair about another woman!

Before Mr. Vereker had drawn sufficient inspiration from the fire to arrive at any definite resolve, the door opened, and Captain Beauclerc and Mr. Deerbrook entered.

Angie knew by one glance at her husband's face that he had heard the story of Duke's new love: she had not broached the subject to him herself.

Mr. Deerbrook proposed a game of whist. He saw that the rest of the party were rather out of sorts, and that no one was much inclined to be genial or talkative; not even Angie, whom he had always considered the "best company in the world."

The table was set, and the game commenced. For the first time in his life, Captain Beauclerc revoked. Cis Deerbrook was the only person who remarked it.

Later, when Angie's maid was brushing her hair, her husband came in. He fidgeted about for a minute or two, and then said with some irritation,

"Does that hair-brushing business go on all night, because I have something to say to you?"

"You can go," Angie said to the maid, taking the brush herself, but she laid it down in her lap, and, leaning back against the chair, waited to hear her lord's pleasure.

"What's this I hear about Duke?" he uttered sharply, almost before the door had closed on the departing abigail. And he looked at her with a stern inquisitorial glance as though she were a criminal and he her judge. Angie resented his tone intensely—she was feeling deeply mortified and hurt already, and the one object of her life was to conceal her emotion from everyone, for what right had she to be bitter, or wounded, or angry? What right had she to the affection of any man save one, and why should it grieve her to see Duke's love diverted from her and given to another?"

So she answered very coldly and without looking at her husband,

"I do not know what you have heard."

"You know well enough, I expect," cried Captain Beauclerc with increased irritation. "He has fallen head over ears in love with this chit of a girl and wants to marry her."

"Well!" said Angie coolly, raising her eyes to his face.

"Well!" repeated Algy with exasperation. "Well! D——n it, I suppose you know that if he marries,

you've seen the last of him and are not likely to set your foot here again."

"No," said Angie quietly. "I do not suppose we shall ever come here again."

She was so hurt and bitter, more even at her husband's behaviour than at Duke's, that she was rather glad to have some one to vent her bitterness upon.

"I don't know about *we*," blustered Algy—"there's nothing to interfere with my friendship and Duke's, but you may take your oath *your* day will be over, once he gets a wife."

"Then," returned Angie, still in the same tone and eyeing him with the unflinching glance that he abhorred, "as long as you are all right, why trouble yourself about me? It is very kind of you, but you see I am not used to so much attention on your part."

Her husband stood and glared at her for a moment—then, as he made for the door, he said,

"If you let him marry, you're a greater fool than I take you for," and he marched out and banged it behind him.

Angie sat on gazing vaguely at the spot where he had lately stood. Her heart was gnawed by a bitter pain—she felt so absolutely lonely and uncared for. Of how many women with loving hearts, yearning and craving for affection is it not the doom to pass the best years of their lives lonely, uncom-

forted! They have loved once; they have been deceived—if they prize virtue and self-respect, they must evermore suffer widowhood. Was it with this intention that a Supreme Power made love the strongest need of a woman's nature that she might be made to suffer eternally through it? or will it some day be recognized that men made the laws which bind women, and made them to suit their own convenience! Now Angie felt like one cast high and dry on a barren shore. Hitherto she had not suffered so much from Algy's indifference because of Duke's devotion; now that she had lost him, there was no one to whom she could turn. A great sense of desolation swept over her; an immense craving for love and tenderness: she felt almost capable of going to Algy and saying to him, "Only show me a little kindness and affection. I will forget all the past—let us try to be something to each other!" If such a prayer would have called forth any response, she would have made it on her knees, forgetting, condoning his selfishness and neglect; but she knew that it would only be met with a sort of wondering contempt, and that she would come away more lonely, more bitter and disappointed at heart than before.

Duke was bent on this marriage—of that there was not the smallest shadow of doubt, and, in due course, all obstacles would be removed. It was absurd to suppose that Belhaven would continue to

stand in his sister-in-law's light—it was simply a question of time. If Angie had been the intriguing schemer that her enemies professed to believe her, she would have been at this moment setting to work to get all she could out of Duke before her enforced abdication from power; but she felt instead that, under these altered circumstances, it would be impossible for her to accept anything from him even for her boy.

It was with an aching heart that she sought her pillow, and her sad thoughts pursued her even into dreamland.

Duke, after mature reflection, came to the conclusion that there was nothing for it but to give in to Belhaven's "idiotic ideas." Having discussed the matter over and over again with Angie and decided that, at any cost, he *must* see Cilla, he consented to write Lord Belhaven a letter of Mrs. Beauclerc's dictation. She studied to make it seem as natural and as much in his own particular style as possible, and although he copied it from a draft she wrote, it appeared at Red Meade with three words misspelt.

"DEAR BELHAVEN,

"I was rather put out when I left Red Meade the other day because I did not think it quite fair that you should wish to interfere between me and Miss St. George. However, as you have the whip-

hand at present, and as I would rather put up with any conditions than not see her, I have made up my mind to agree to your terms. I will not, for the next six months at all events, make any declaration or try to extract any promise from her. So I hope you will not make any objection to my going over to Red Meade pretty often. Please let me hear by return of post, and as soon as I get your answer I will drive over.

"Yours ever,

"M. VEREKER."

Belhaven was not particularly well-pleased at the receipt of this letter. When he took an idea into his head he was rather tenacious about it, and he had made up his mind that he did not want Cilla to see much of Duke at present. But he could not go back from his word, and wrote rather a cool response to the master of the Court, giving, however, the required permission for a visit. Perhaps it was rather unkind of him to show Duke's letter to Cilla, being sufficiently experienced to know that his lapses in spelling would rather grate upon her sensitive imagination and tone down any romantic feeling that she might be nursing for him in his absence. His idea was perfectly correct. Cilla received a slight shock upon perusing the letter of the individual whom she had been trying rather hard to make a hero of. But she was relieved to

think that he was bound over to abstain from these practical demonstrations of his affection which had caused her such uncomfortable sensations on the occasion of his last visit.

Duke appeared next day at Red Meade in the highest spirits, and as he faithfully kept his promise, and only showed the state of his feelings by an expressive glance now and then, Cilla was perfectly at her ease, and put him back on his pedestal; the misspelt words notwithstanding. She remembered to have heard that spelling was a gift, and that many very highly educated people were unable to acquire it.

Duke's particular object on this day was to get a promise from Lady Belhaven to drive over with her sister to lunch, in order that Angie might have an opportunity of seeing the perfect creature on whom he had bestowed his affections. Like a man, he was certain that Angie had only to see Cilla to appreciate and admire her thoroughly. But the thing was to get Lady Belhaven to come. Would it be better to tell her that Mrs. Beauclerc was at the Court, or to conceal the fact? Poor Duke was sorely puzzled on this head. If he could only get speech of his beautiful hostess alone! She looked such a pretty, soft, yielding creature, he was sure anyone could persuade her to do anything. But Belhaven stuck to them. There was no getting rid of him. How infernally suspicious he must be! As

if he (Duke) was not to be trusted after he had given his word!

"I wish you would come and shoot on Saturday," said Mr. Vereker to his host shortly before his departure, and Belhaven consented. Then Duke turned to her ladyship. "Won't you and Miss St. George drive over to lunch," he asked in a tone of entreaty, and Dorothea, who had been dreadfully bored and dull lately, responded sweetly,

"I daresay we might manage it. Is there anyone staying at the Court whom I know?"

"Algy Beauclerc and his wife," blurted out Duke, colouring in spite of himself. "I think you know them."

"Very slightly," answered Dorothea coldly, making up her mind that they would not go.

Duke remarked her altered tone with apprehension, and plunged hastily into a catalogue of his other guests, finishing with Cis Deerbrook.

Then Dorothea smiled and brightened again. She liked Cis; they used to have great fun together before she married. She forgot Mrs. Beauclerc and Cilla's prospects. Yes, decidedly they would go.

Belhaven looked a little glum. I am afraid there was something of the Turk about him, and that he would have liked to shut up his beautiful wife, and never to let another man see her. He was quite aware that jealousy was a foolish, as well as a painful disorder. He made laudable efforts to con-

quer it, and talked seriously to himself on the subject, but when he saw his lovely Dorothea smile at another man, he was apt to forget all the good advice he had given himself, and to feel unhappy and sulky.

When Duke had taken his leave, radiant at having extracted Lady Belhaven's promise, Dorothea remarked to her sister,

"You had better be on your guard against Angie Beauclerc. We are only asked over there that you may be trotted out for her benefit."

"Do not let us go then!" cried Cilla with an indignant flush.

For now that Mrs. Beauclerc occupied in her mind the place of the wicked lady of romance, she had all sorts of vague terrors and apprehensions regarding her.

"Oh," said Dorothea lightly, "you are bound to meet her some time or other. As well first as last."

CHAPTER XIV.

DUKE has made all his arrangements for the visit of the ladies of Red Meade. He cannot receive them in person because he must be with the shooting-party, especially as Belhaven is coming over early to join it. And, as he wants the old and the new love to meet and to know each other, he thinks his absence will give them a better opportunity of striking up the friendship he anticipates than his presence would do. He means, however, to slip away about half-past three in order to enjoy a few minutes at least in the presence of his young love.

He has drawn Angie aside before starting in the morning, and, squeezing her hand, said entreatingly,

"I know *you* will like her and appreciate her. Try to draw her out. I wish you could get her to sing to you, but she is so shy before people."

Angie has smiled at him in return with a well-simulated expression of cordiality. None the less she hates the task that he has imposed upon her, and wonders with some bitterness of heart why men and lovers should be so wanting in fine feeling and

perception for everyone save the object of the hour's passion.

It is not that she has conceived a prejudice against or dislike to Cilla; not that she regards the girl as a hated rival come to oust her from power: since she first heard of Duke's infatuation, she has looked upon her own loss as inevitable and has braced herself to think of it as an accomplished fact. And, being a good-hearted woman, she is not disposed to hate Cilla, nor to plot against her, but, if she could have met her alone and face to face, would have been inclined to be kind and friendly towards her, and even to look with interest for traits in her character that might seem to augur well for Duke's happiness. The real trial was that she should be compelled to meet Cilla before the eyes of the other women who were staying at the Court. They were all Angie's friends; not one of them owed her ill-will or anything but kindness, but she knew her world. She knew that in society one's friends, though they would not assist or even connive at our downfall, will watch with by no means a disagreeable sensation to see the catastrophe happen, and that their condoling and sympathetic glances are but a little civil mask to hide an unacknowledged gratification at witnessing the humiliation of one whom Fortune has once seemed to favour. And, indeed, the other four ladies at the Court who liked Angie and were her very good friends; who, moreover, but for

that circumstance would probably not have had the opportunity of enjoying Mr. Vereker's hospitality, were looking forward with the most eager interest and curiosity to see the young Esther to whom Duke had held out the sceptre; the future reigning deity of the Court whose advent would dethrone Angie and put her in a lower position than that occupied by any of themselves. They might come here under the new sovereign, but Angie, they were tolerably sure, clever as she was, would be exiled for ever. They asked themselves and each other, Did Miss St. George know about Angie? and they felt pretty certain, individually and collectively, that she did. Lady Belhaven was a thorough woman of the world, and had been a great deal in society. But, on the other hand, would she think it wise to enlighten her sister? The position was one full of interest; none of Angie's fellow-guests would have missed witnessing the meeting for worlds.

Angie would have given a great deal to be able to delegate the duties of hostess to any other member of the party on this occasion, but, in the absence of Lady Chester, the *rôle* always fell upon her. If she were absent from the room when Lady Belhaven and her sister were announced, it would look like an intentional slight: on the other hand, Angie's sensitiveness told her that Miss St. George, with the jealous prejudices of a young girl, might resent her assumption of so important a position, and promise

to herself to slight and mortify her when the time came.

Angie, however, had not learnt self-possession for nothing; if her friends surmised that she must feel uncomfortable and ill at ease there was nothing in her look or manner to indicate these disagreeable emotions—she was embroidering roses on satin and chatting gaily. Nevertheless her heart beat nervously as Lady Belhaven and Miss St. George were announced, and it was with a slightly heightened colour that she rose and went forward to meet them, feeling that every eye was upon her, bent on remarking how she comported herself.

Lady Belhaven came towards her with her sweetest smile; her most charming manner, looking so lovely that, in a moment, everyone's thoughts were diverted from Cilla to admiration of her lovely sister. Cilla was in an agony of nervousness, produced by a remark from Dorothea as the carriage rolled up the drive.

"Remember," she said, "that they will all be watching you like so many cats—of course they know all about it. And whatever you do, be on your guard against *that woman*. She will be sure to try and draw you out on purpose to ridicule and make fun of you afterwards. The less you say the better. Leave the talking to me. I flatter myself," with a complacent little smile, "that I am a match for the best of them."

To a sensitive nature like Cilla's, nothing is so terrible as ridicule; if Lady Belhaven had wished to make her sister appear at her very worst, she could not have gone to work more cleverly to accomplish her desire. As Cilla entered the Court, she felt utterly wretched, and full of dislike and fear towards Angie. Therefore, when that lady greeted her kindly and pleasantly, she merely responded in the coldest, stiffest manner, and Angie felt at once that the girl's mind had been poisoned against her.

Dorothea knew two of the other ladies, and was presented to the rest, and they were all so charmed with her that they almost forgot Cilla after a moment's contemptuous wonder what on earth Duke could see in her.

Lady Belhaven devoted herself principally to Mrs. Beauclerc, whom she treated in the most gracious and friendly, almost caressing manner. Miss Harcourt, the only unmarried lady, took possession of Cilla. That she was unmarried was her misfortune, not her fault: she had all the ideas and instincts of a young married woman of the day: all she lacked was the appendage of a husband, a want she felt and regretted sincerely, and was always on the look out to repair.

"It is so ridiculous!" she was wont to say with heart-felt earnestness, "for a woman at my age" (she was twenty-three) "to be playing the *ingénue;* to

have to be so dreadfully careful what I say and do because I am *a girl*. What chance have I without a woman's greatest attraction, a husband? This is a frightful age for girls to live in. If you amuse yourself, you get such a reputation that men won't think of marrying you, and if you try to seem quiet and innocent, they say you are 'tedious,' and don't amuse them. I shall never forgive Mamma for not *making* me marry old Sir John. I should have been a widow now, with lots of thousands a year. What if I did cry, and declare I would drown myself. She ought to have treated me like a child who wouldn't take its physic. She might have known I should thank and bless her on my knees afterwards."

"Why don't you make haste, and take out a 'flirting licence' then?" inquired one of her friends.

"Because," she retorted, "the only man who wants to marry me has no money, and every year I want more. Unfortunately, as my opportunities diminish, my wants increase."

As Miss Harcourt had only one idea in the world, society and gaiety; as the only theme upon which she cared to converse was the sayings and doings of a certain set, it may be conjectured that she found talking to Cilla rather up-hill work; Cilla, who knew nothing of society and the people who constituted it; Cilla, who was weighted besides with the fear of exciting ridicule. She blushed, stammered, answered little more than Yes and No, and

was acutely conscious that, with every moment, she was sinking deeper and deeper into the mire of her interlocutor's contempt.

Miss Harcourt was indeed making the most unflattering remarks upon her in her own mind.

"This stupid, *gauche* creature to have caught Duke," she said to herself, "when *I*, and dozens more good-looking, amusing girls have failed utterly. I always thought he was rather a fool. He doesn't seem to care for beauty. Angie is barely good-looking, but then she's awfully clever and amusing. But this oaf! How I hate those great saucer-eyes!"

The announcement of luncheon is a relief to both, and Miss Harcourt is careful to place a considerable distance between herself and Cilla at the table. No one seems very anxious for the society of Miss St. George, and she is left with a vacant chair on her right hand. She glances, half enviously, wholly admiringly at her beautiful sister, whom everyone is loading with attentions; whom everyone seems anxious to be near. She has pretty, gracious smiles and words for each person who addresses her: Angie, by whom she sits, is full of cordial admiration for her — beauty always attracts Angie. Lady Belhaven is bent on making herself agreeable to Mrs. Beauclerc, whom, in her heart, she looks upon as a wily and skilful enemy to be circumvented. The lady on Cilla's right says a few civil

words to her young neighbour, and then, for she is hungry, devotes herself entirely to her lunch.

It is nearly half over when a door immediately in front of Cilla opens and gives ingress to a man. As is only natural, being just opposite to her, his eyes meet hers, and a little flutter of pleasurable emotion traverses her heart which is rarely susceptible to impressions from gracious and comely objects. And the new arrival is pleasant and good to look at in the highest degree.

He speaks first to Angie in a voice that most agreeably salutes Cilla's sensitive ears.

"What will all you ladies say to me for breaking in upon your charmed circle? The fact is," (and here everyone sees that he is limping), "I twisted my foot a little bit, and so I thought I would come home."

Angie, always eager to alleviate suffering, makes a dozen inquiries and suggestions, but he treats the matter very lightly. By this time he has taken Dorothea's hand, and evinced with eyes and lips his pleasure at meeting her again, and it is evident that Lady Belhaven is almost equally gratified.

There are only two vacant chairs at the table; the one next Cilla and another by Miss Harcourt.

"Come and sit by me, Mr. Deerbrook," says the latter with an inviting smile, but he rejoins with a pleasant little nod, taking the seat near Cilla,

"I like to sit where I can look at you."

Cis always does exactly what suits himself, but he has a way of doing it that disarms resentment.

The moment he is seated, he turns to Cilla and says in a tone so soft and pleasing that it is almost a caress,

"I have known your sister a long time—we are quite old friends, but do you know that until a week ago I was not aware that there was such a personage as Miss St. George."

With this Cilla looks up at him, and encounters the most beautiful, expressive dark blue eyes that she has ever seen. For his part, Cis Deerbrook is equally struck with the orbs that meet his.

"I was in the school-room. I did not go out with Dorothea—with my sister," she answers, feeling much less shy at his address than she did with Miss Harcourt.

"But next year," he says with a flattering little air of interest, "you will be coming out, and we shall meet often, I hope. Tell me, how do you amuse yourself at Red Meade?"

And Cilla, whose shyness has vanished before his pleasant manner, tells him about her pug, her books, her songs in the simplest, most natural way in the world. He knows her favourite works, and he is devoted to singing; sings a little himself—perhaps some day they may have a duet together. He has heard of her voice from Duke; and here his

eyes meet hers full, and she is horribly vexed and ashamed because of the involuntary pink that flies to her transparent skin. A benevolent little smile plays about Cis Deerbrook's lips which vexes Cilla still more: it seems to say, "It is quite natural that you should blush at the sound of your lover's name." Without knowing it herself, she is resenting that he should think of Duke as her lover, or rather, as being beloved by her.

Miss Harcourt has shot several glances across the table at the pair. She is far more disgusted with Cilla now than half an hour ago, when she simply thought her a fool. "She is one of those odious creatures," she says to herself, "who have not a word to say to women, but are ready to jump down a man's throat the instant he comes into the room."

"I was at Red Meade once some years ago," Cis remarks to his young neighbour, unobservant of or indifferent to Miss Harcourt's glances. "I remember there was some charming old oak furniture there. I suppose it still exists."

"Yes," returns Cilla. "I delight in it, but Thea does not like it—she wants to persuade Granville to have modern furniture instead."

"How barbarous of her!" laughs Cis. "Fancy wanting to put modern furniture into 'ancestral halls'!"

"The chairs are not very comfortable," says Cilla apologetically.

"I wonder," remarks Mr. Deerbrook in a low voice, dismissing the subject of furniture for the moment, "whether I shall ever be asked to Red Meade again? It is a delightful old place, and now that it has two such charming ladies to heighten its attractions, I feel tremendously anxious to renew my acquaintance with it."

Two such charming ladies!

Poor little Cilla! She has not been used to these flattering speeches; to hear herself ranked with the beautiful Dorothea, except, perhaps, by Duke, whose honest admiration is expressed as awkwardly and bluntly as the blandishments of a Newfoundland dog.

But Cis possesses *par excellence* the art of saying pleasant things, and saying them in the manner that most pleases women.

For the last two or three minutes Angie has been carefully, though furtively, watching Cilla. She had not thought much of her at first; had indeed been considerably puzzled to know how or why she had attracted Duke so powerfully, but now she can realize it better. The face with the cold, stiff expression upon it which she had at first seen certainly presented nothing remarkable except the eyes which were fine in shape and colour, but now, lighted up, even to radiance, brimful of expression, quivering

with pleasure and eagerness, Angie recognized the brilliant intelligence that lay behind; guessed at the sympathetic tenderness, the sensitiveness of the girl's nature, and looked at her with a sort of melancholy interest as at one whose path must inevitably be bright with sunshine and black with tempests as the lives of highly-strung, over-sensitive people are ever wont to be.

With Duke, intelligence was everything: beauty played a second-rate part. When the fire of Cilla's eyes was kindled, Angie saw that they made all her face beautiful, and that it was a beauty much more calculated to inspire passion and devotion than any mere pink-and-white porcelain prettiness. A momentary heart-sickness crept over her: she felt old, and sad, and hopeless; yet she looked at the girl with no unkind or envious eyes. She felt, indeed, rather drawn towards her.

When, after lunch, the party adjourns to the drawing-room, Cis seats himself beside Lady Belhaven.

"Is your foot really hurt?" she asks him with some archness, seeing that his limp is scarcely perceptible.

"Not seriously, not dangerously," he answers smiling. "Shall I tell you the truth?" lowering his voice. "I wanted to see you, and so I made a pretext of tripping over a stone in order that I might

gratify my desire. You know, I have not seen you since you married and broke my heart."

It is pleasant to Dorothea to be talked to in this light strain after Belhaven's serious and rather tedious love-making. She smiles at Cis, and enters gaily on a little flirtation with him.

"Have you got it mended yet?" she laughs. "I expect it has been broken so often that it is past mending, and so you have put it up on a shelf out of the way of harm, as one does a valuable old bit of cracked china."

"How unkind of you to make fun of my sufferings!" he says with laughing eyes. "But tell me! Is your marriage a success? Is the honeymoon still going on?"

"The honeymoon!" scoffs Dorothea. "I am quite an old married woman now."

"And is life at Red Meade cheery?" inquires Cis, pursuing his catechism.

Dorothea purses up her pretty mouth.

"Cheery!" she observes. "No, I don't think you have exactly hit upon the right word. Cheery hardly expresses it. I just exist by looking forward to next season, when I shall go to London and see a few of my fellow-creatures."

"I suppose you are rather badly off for neighbours?" suggests Mr. Deerbrook.

"Rather. And then, you know, now we are in such deep mourning we cannot go out or entertain at all."

She speaks in a matter-of-fact voice. For the last month she has been able to refer, without any particular pathos, to her mother's death—it seems already such a long time ago.

Cis, who dislikes disagreeable and melancholy subjects, hastens to pass over this one.

"Should I be allowed to call at Red Meade?" he says. "Is Belhaven at all Blue Beardish? Does he want to keep you locked up? I am not at all sure that I should not, if I were he."

Dorothea laughs gaily.

"I do not know what his wishes on the subject may be," she answers. "But I know that I should be delighted to see you, for we never set eyes upon any man, except Mr. Vereker."

"Your future brother-in-law," smiles Cis.

"Hush!" says Dorothea warningly. "It is high treason to say so. Bel won't hear of it at present."

"And your sister? By the way, what lovely eyes she has! What does she say on the subject?"

"I don't think she cares one way or the other," returns Dorothea indifferently. "Of course, if I had a voice in the matter, I should insist upon the marriage taking place at once. I am afraid he may change his mind."

"He is very keen about it now," says Cis. "But do you mean to say, solemnly, that you cannot make your husband do just what you like?"

"I! certainly not."

"Then what is the use of being beautiful?" asks Cis, as though he were propounding a serious question. "I am afraid many of you lovely creatures throw away your chances when you first marry. You ought to begin by making slaves of your husbands; they would get used to their chains, and habit is very strong."

"A husband is very different from a lover," observes Dorothea tritely.

"That is because you don't go the right way to work," replies Cis. "I expect you won't take the trouble."

"Perhaps," says Dorothea lightly.

"But when may I come over to Red Meade?" asks Cis, returning to the object which he has in view.

Lady Belhaven bethinks her what a delightful change it would be from their present dulness to have Cis for a guest.

"Why not come over and stay a day or two?" she says brightly.

The moment the words have left her lips she knows she has done a rash thing. What will Bel say?

"May I?" cries Cis eagerly. "I shall be too delighted."

"When do you leave here?" asks Dorothea.

"On Tuesday. I am due at Blank Castle on that day, but I can put off my visit till Thursday."

"Do come then," says Dorothea, half elated, half frightened.

Bel will be very angry no doubt, but it will be a good opportunity of showing him that she does not intend to be treated like a child or a slave.

CHAPTER XV.

ANGIE, seeing that Lady Belhaven and Mr. Deerbrook are engrossed with each other, goes and sits beside Cilla, and tries to draw her into conversation. But Dorothea's words have had their full effect, and the girl only sees in Mrs. Beauclerc an enemy bent on turning her into ridicule. With "a fair field and no favour," Angie would have won the heart of Duke's young love in ten minutes: she was the woman of all others to charm an impressionable girl, but it is uphill work fighting against prejudice.

Cilla has never mixed with the world; is ignorant of social tact; does not know the use of a mask, and wears her heart open and unguarded on her sleeve. It is patent to all the curious eyes that are watching the pair, either openly or furtively, that Miss St. George knows "all about Angie," and that she does not mean to be deluded into any semblance of friendliness with her.

Angie, sensitive as Cilla herself, though she has all the advantage of the domino and mask which women of the world employ, is provoked at the girl's manner; at her chilling air, her trite, embar-

rassed responses. It is a relief to her when the door is thrown eagerly open, and Duke's radiant, smiling face appears. She yields her place to him, and returns to embroidering her crimson roses.

Duke, having greeted Lady Belhaven, throws himself joyfully into the chair which Angie has vacated, and begins to talk in a low, rapid voice to Cilla, devouring her meantime with his eyes. He has forgotten that he said to himself only this morning that he must be careful not to make too much of her before Mrs. Beauclerc, for fear of hurting that lady's feelings.

But ere three minutes have elapsed, he is conscious that something is wrong: somehow he cannot meet the lovely eyes in whose liquid depths he is wont to find his Heaven: her manner is *distraite* and rather cold; she seems to have very little to say to him. And all day he has been thinking about her and how he shall manage to steal away to her, and counting the hours, nay, the very minutes. A sense of disappointment creeps over him. He feels as if everyone present must remark how cold and indifferent her manner towards him is. And indeed, they do, all except Angie who keeps her eyes resolutely fixed upon her roses, and Dorothea and Cis who are quite engrossed with each other.

There is a resentful feeling in Cilla's breast She feels that a *rôle* is being thrust upon her before

all these people, a *rôle* that she has just discovered is unpleasant and repulsive to her. She is *not* Duke's property, thanks to Lord Belhaven, and she feels sincerely grateful to him at this moment: she is as free as air, and not in any way, not in the very smallest degree, bound to the master of the Court. And yet, two hours ago, she had known quite well the position she would occupy in the eyes of his guests, and had not resented it. Her eyes wander to the Greek profile, the close cut, chestnut locks of Cis Deerbrook as he sits in animated converse with her sister, and it occurs to her that Duke is heavy and not very entertaining. She has forgotten how much she liked him; how interested she had been in his talk that evening at Red Meade and the subsequent one at the Court. Then he had seemed the nicest, kindest, most delightful person in the world: she had promoted him to honour as a hero in her thoughts—to-day he was only a big, dull, homely sort of man. Why did he look at her in that masterful sort of way as if she were his property? Why did he sink his voice to those half-tones? She raises her own rather more than usual in answering him, so that everyone may be aware that she, at least, is only saying what all the world may hear. For the youngest and tenderest-hearted maid can always be cruel to the man who voluntarily places his neck beneath her little foot.

It is an immense relief to Cilla when the carriage

is announced and Lady Belhaven rises and makes her adieux.

Graceful and charming as they are, and much as everyone is prepossessed by her, it is a relief to the ladies at the Court when she has departed with her sister. The house-party always look upon the advent of strangers as a bore, especially when they engross the attention of their men.

Angie tries to slip away to her room. She has a bitter consciousness that the other women are dying to talk over Duke's fancy; to make comments on her own behaviour and conjectures as to her feelings; and she is willing enough to give them every opportunity. Indeed, all she wants is to be alone—not to think. She would be glad enough to escape from herself, too, if it were possible. But, alas! it is not. Unfortunately for her, Duke, returning from seeing his guests off, catches sight of her dress from the other end of the corridor, and flies after her up the stairs.

A charming suite of rooms, never occupied by anyone else, is set apart for her especial use—into the pretty boudoir Duke unceremoniously follows her.

"Well!" he cries eagerly—"what do you think of her?"

Once more Angie has to shroud herself in her domino and replace her mask. She tries to make both smile and voice genial.

"She has beautiful eyes, and I can quite fancy that she is clever," she responds.

"I knew you would see it," cries Duke. "You are such a good judge—you always understand people. I'm awfully glad you and she got on."

Angie hesitates a moment.

"As to getting on," she says presently, "I cannot say very much about that. There is no doubt she has been prejudiced against me, and I could scarcely induce her to speak to me."

"What an infernal shame!" exclaims Duke hotly, his thoughts at once flying to Belhaven. "But when I tell her all about you—how you've been my best friend and stuck to me all through and prevented my making a fool of myself and done everything for me, she'll get to love you, I know. Why, you're so like each other in many things, you're bound to get on."

"It does not always follow," replies Angie a little wearily. She would like to add, "And really it is a matter of perfect indifference to me what Miss St. George thinks of me," but, instead, she says,

"At all events, I feel kindly disposed towards her, and shall be always glad to be friendly if she does not make it impossible."

"Oh, that will be all right," answers Duke with a little air of authority, for, with the departure of his lady-love, his doubts and fears have vanished

too, and he feels once more as though she belonged to him. "But," returning eagerly to the charge, "you can see, can't you, that she is beautiful and clever and charming, not only a pretty doll like Lady Belhaven and the rest of them," (contemptuously), "but a creature with a heart and soul."

"Oh, yes," returns Angie, trying to put a little enthusiasm into her voice and wishing with all her might that Duke would only go away and leave her.

He drums for a moment on the table, then, looking up suddenly, says with a heightened colour and an unwonted diffidence in his strong, hearty voice,

"Do you—do you think she cares at all about me?"

"To tell you the truth," Angie answers frankly, "as soon as you came in, I devoted myself to my work—I always think it more discreet not to look at people who—who are supposed to be in love."

"I wish you had," observes Duke regretfully. "Not, perhaps, that you could have judged to-day: she was not quite like herself. I daresay all those women being there made her shy. You see, she's so very young, and she has never been into society at all."

He casts a wistful glance at Angie. She always says the right thing, and he wants her to say that of course it is natural Cilla should have been shy and anxious to hide her real feelings.

But Angie who has had a severe strain upon her to-day has no inclination to prolong the discussion, and instead of answering him goes to the window and looks out at the pale streak of red across the grey sky in the waning light.

Then it occurs to Duke as it did once before that this woman cares for him, though she has concealed it all these years, and that she suffers at the knowledge of his new love. Remorse smites him. He banishes all thought of Cilla for the moment, and, going up to Angie, says with his kindest manner,

"Are you comfortable here? Have you got everything you want? Would you like anything altered?" and she turns and answers smiling, stifling the bitter sigh that rises from her heart,

"Everything is perfect. I could not make a suggestion."

"That's all right," says Duke heartily, and takes her hand. "Remember, whatever happens, that I shall always think of you as my best and dearest friend."

She knows, if he does not, that these are but vain words, but she thanks him for them by a little pressure of the hand. After this, he releases her from his presence, and, betaking himself to the drawing-room, shyly tries his fair friends on the subject of Miss St. George. Although each in turn

assumes an air of polite interest, it is evident that not one of them has any original or flattering remark to make about his child-love: they warm to enthusiasm about her sister, but of Cilla they have nothing to remark, except, perhaps, that she has fine eyes and that she is very young.

Is it jealousy of her superiority? Duke wonders to himself. How rum women are about each other!

At dinner that evening, Cis Deerbrook sits next to Angie. He has known her for years and has the heartiest regard and liking for her as a charming, amusing woman; the dispenser of most agreeable hospitalities both of her own and Duke's. It occurs to him that a change of châtelaineship at the Court would be very much the reverse of an improvement.

Mrs. Beauclerc has an equally friendly regard for Cis: she likes him principally perhaps because he is so good to look at, and secondly, on account of his cheery manner and general talent for saying pleasant things. If she knows his weaknesses, they do not interfere with her. Are not all men selfish? handsome men super-eminently so? After all, who makes them selfish? who panders to their vanity, their love of pleasure? who laughs at and makes light of the sufferings they inflict on other women? is it not always a woman?

"Do you know," says Cis, turning his laughing eyes on Angie, "I am hatching a little conspiracy?"

"Really?" she says with an answering smile.

"I have got myself asked to Red Meade, and, though it would be much more congenial to my feelings to devote myself to Lady Belhaven, I am going to make love to the sister and try to put Duke's nose out of joint."

"Are you?" says Angie lightly. "You must be a bold man if you think you can put the nose of eighty thousand a year out of joint."

"We shall see," smiles Cis. "It is the most ridiculous mania on his part and would quite spoil him for his friends if he were allowed to carry it out."

Angie smiles. His words make not the smallest impression upon her. It is only Cis's light, jesting way of talking, and the conversation drifts off into another channel.

As the carriage rolled swiftly towards Red Meade with the sisters, each sat silently in her corner occupied with her own thoughts. Dorothea was thinking how on earth she was to tell Bel of her invitation to Cis, and Cilla was engaged in clothing all her heroes and fairy princes by turn with the presentment of Mr. Deerbrook. He was the first really handsome man to whom she had ever spoken, and he had, besides, a charm of manner which Belhaven and Duke, kind and nice as

they both were, lacked entirely. Cis had taken entire possession of the girl's thoughts: she had not one to spare for anyone else: the one grievous reflection was that it would be so long before she would see him again. Next season they would meet in London—he had said so; had hoped so. On this scanty aliment, Cilla proposed to feed her dreams for the next six months: she had forgotten for the time that there had been any question of her marrying Duke. Marriage! what a bugbear! what an odious thought! what a vulgar, prosaic ending of all sweet and pleasant things! love was the only fit theme for young hearts to dwell upon. But suppose one loved some handsome, perfect being and were beloved by him in return? Then if marriage meant being always in his presence, always looking into his eyes, and hearing the caressing tones of his harmonious voice; the commonplace word was a synonym for being in paradise.

In some such strain ran the girl's vague, unpractical, impossible ideas.

Meantime Dorothea has come to the conclusion that the best way of informing her lord of what she has done will be to tell him publicly at dinner before Cilla and the servants, as though it were the most natural thing in the world and a matter of course. She knows that, however angry he may be, he will at all events not vent his displeasure in words in the presence of his servants, and, by the

end of dinner, he will have time to cool down. So, when the fish is served, she says with her sweetest smile,

"Cis Deerbrook is coming here on Tuesday to stay till Thursday. He was going on to Blank Castle, but I persuaded him to put off his visit."

Dorothea's words produce a startling effect on her hearers: Belhaven's brow grows black as night, a joyous light leaps to Cilla's eyes and a bright flush of colour to her face which she bends over her plate to conceal.

Belhaven answers not one word. Dorothea continues to chat gaily on as though ignorant of his displeasure, and, as he preserves absolute silence, presently directs her remarks to her sister, who is quite aware of Bel's feelings and for once does not sympathise with them.

When they rise from dinner, Cilla betakes herself to her room, opens her window wide, and looks out into the starlit night. It is a habit of hers; to-night she stands longer than usual contemplating the heavens with eyes that are themselves like two bright stars.

My lord and my lady are together downstairs. Dorothea has settled herself snugly near the fire. Belhaven stands with his back to it, trying to command himself sufficiently to speak with calmness. His lips are twitching nervously; his hands are working; when

he is angry, if he is anxious to restrain himself from being violent, he assumes a tone of icy coldness. He has never been so angry before; at all events not with his wife—he does not want to frighten her nor to be brutal with her, but he means her to understand that she must never take upon herself to do again what she has done to-day.

"I understood you to say at dinner," he begins in a voice that trembles in spite of its studied coldness, "that you have asked Mr. Deerbrook over here to stay."

Dorothea throws her pretty head back and regards her lord with an amiable smile. If her heart is fluttering, she gives very much less evidence of it than Belhaven does of his emotion.

"I must tell you," he proceeds, speaking a little faster and louder as his anger will creep out, "that I am excessively annoyed and displeased at your having done so and that I must beg that you will never, under any circumstances, do such a thing again. Ask what women you please; it is for *me* to invite the men."

"Cis is such an old friend of mine," replies Dorothea lightly. "I could not do less than ask him."

Belhaven's voice, in spite of him, grows rougher and angrier.

"Cis Deerbrook is a man whom I particularly

object to. And, once for all, understand that *I will not* have men of his class hanging about *my* house. I don't intend to be one of the husbands to be laughed and jibed at whilst men" (lashing himself into a rage) "make love to my wife under my nose."

Dorothea has an excellent temper: she rarely loses it: if she does she has sufficient self-control to conceal the loss. She is of a placid disposition, with no inclination to violence or anger—she knows, besides, that the one who can keep his temper is always the victor in the long run. And you can plant your daggers in your adversary's heart with a much surer aim when your eye is steady and your hand firm. She has been perfectly aware, ever since she gave the invitation, that it will be the occasion of a struggle between her and her husband. It is very important that she should get the best of it, and she has quite arranged in her own mind what she will say and do.

Apparently unobservant of or indifferent to Belhaven's wrath, Dorothea gives a slight yawn.

"I only asked him," she says in a matter of fact voice, "because it is so deadly dull here. I thought he would be a god-send to all of us."

She has wielded her dart well—it has plunged into the very centre of the heart at which she aimed it. Belhaven is reduced for the moment to utter silence by the horrible pain of the blow. To

be insufficient to make the happiness of the creature whom he so ardently loves is a cruel thought—it is a thought he has not dared to put into words—now Dorothea has done it for him.

"I am sorry," he says after a long pause, with intense bitterness in his voice, "that you are so dull; that I bore you so much."

"It is unfortunate," agrees Dorothea with perfect coolness.

"I wish to God," cries poor Belhaven passionately, "that I had known before you married me that you did not care for me, and that you were only taking me for what I could give you."

"And I wish," returns Dorothea cruelly, but without any inflexion of anger in her voice, "that I had known you meant to keep me shut up in the country without ever seeing another man. Then, if you had been a duke with six times as much as you have, I would not have married you."

The pain is greater than Belhaven can bear. He flies away to his own room and locks himself in in the dark, leaving Dorothea triumphant, pleased with herself, and not in the very least regretful or penitent for having wounded him. Five minutes afterwards she is sleeping as peacefully and happily as a tired child—the air has made her sleepy.

Meantime, Belhaven is raging like a wounded lion. He is very sensitive: his nature is in some respects like a woman's. He begins by thinking of

all sorts of impossible things—he will go away to the furthest parts of the earth and leave this heartless woman to be happy without him—perhaps, when he is irrevocably lost to her, she will be sorry, will want him back again. Then his wrath turned on Cis. He should not enter his doors; he would write him a cold note, saying that they could not receive him. He would go off abroad at once, taking his wife and Cilla with him—he would run up to London alone and not return until Cis's visit was over.

But after an hour of anguish, wrath, and misery, during which Dorothea was sweetly sleeping, he calmed down and his old slavish adoration for his beautiful wife came creeping back—he felt there was only one thing he could not bear, to be away from her or to be on bad terms with her. He returned to the room where he had left her, ready to make any concession; desiring but one thing, reconciliation.

Cilla was in the room, but quite engrossed, apparently at least, with a book. Dorothea was asleep. Asleep, whilst he had been suffering all that agony! As he approached her she opened her eyes.

"I was in the midst of such a delightful dream," she said, and turned her face to the cushion and closed her eyes again as if to court it back.

Belhaven knelt beside her and took her hand with a hot, passionate clasp. It recalled to Dorothea

what had happened. She drew her hand coldly away from him and said,

"Pray leave me alone. I am tired."

And she went to sleep again. Cilla continued to read and Belhaven sat staring at the fire.

CHAPTER XVI.

CIS DEERBROOK'S visit to Red Meade was the cause of almost as much heart burning as the advent of the goddess

> "that uninvited came
> Into the fair Peleïan banquet-hall,
> And cast the golden fruit upon the board."

He arrived in time for dinner on the appointed day, and Belhaven, who, like most hasty-tempered people, soon calmed down again after a burst of anger, received him not only hospitably but pleasantly. And Cis had such a charming, taking manner that it was next to impossible, even for those who were most jealous and mistrustful of him, to treat him coldly.

Still, when Belhaven came down dressed for dinner, and found his wife and Cilla adorned for conquest; each having, beyond a doubt, made herself as fair as possible and bared several inches more of white skin than was customary when he was to be the only beholder (for they were in the habit of dining in high dresses because it was "so

cold in the country"), he felt a decided twinge of jealousy and his brow clouded a little. But he had been talking to himself very seriously the last day or two and had given himself the most excellent advice. He had told himself that if he wished his beautiful wife to get bored with him, and, from being bored, to grow gradually to hate him, he could not do it more successfully than by insisting on keeping her entirely to himself and away from other men, and by playing the part of Turk to her. Harem life may satisfy Eastern women who know and ask nothing better than to gossip with each other, to play with their jewels, to eat sweets and smoke *ad libitum*, and even they, we know, if they ever get the chance, will risk their lives for a little excitement of a stronger nature; but to shut up a beautiful European, accustomed to adulation, to leave her high and dry with no men (save one), "to govern in this wood," is indeed to bring down woe and misfortune on one's head.

Of this Belhaven was perfectly aware. Nevertheless, when he saw, not only his wife but Cilla, Cilla who had a mind and was not, he had imagined, the sort of girl to be taken captive by the meretricious and superficial attractions of a man like Cis, laying herself out for his admiration, he did indeed feel a severe twinge.

Unfortunately for himself (Mr. Deerbrook has

not yet appeared), Belhaven cannot resist a little sarcasm.

"What! 'cut square' on the coldest night we have had, and you London bred ladies who are always shivering at the cold in the country?"

He addresses Cilla, and she colours a little and feels a shade less fond of him than is her wont.

Dorothea answers for her with a gay little laugh.

"My dear Bel! we must make a difference for company, particularly appreciative company. It would be quite lost upon you, you know, if we cut ourselves ever so square."

"I think you, at all events, *have* cut yourself *ever so* square," he returns in a displeased voice; the Turk rising in him again as he has leisure to remark the display of Dorothea's beauty that it is gall and wormwood to him to share in company with others.

Here Cis, smiling, *débonnair*, with the slight air of languor that is so eminently becoming to him, enters, and Belhaven, making a great effort over himself, smooths his ruffled brow and tries to be pleasant. But at dinner he cannot help remarking that the four beautiful eyes of the ladies of his family are bent constantly on the guest; that they have a thousand times more light and expression in

them than usual, that, in fact, Cis makes the difference to those jewels that the light of fifty wax candles does to diamonds as compared with the glimmer of a farthing dip. Putting aside his jealousy of Dorothea, he says to himself that it is a sad pity Cilla should not have more control over her eyes and that she should evince so plainly what maiden modesty should teach her to conceal—her attraction towards Cis.

Jealousy has different phases and shows itself in different ways. Some men hate the man who attracts the woman they love—others feel comparatively little ill-feeling towards their rival, but keep all their wrath for the beloved one for whose sake they suffer torment. This was Belhaven's case—he was not angry with Cis, but he was embittered against Dorothea, and, in a much less degree, against Cilla. He had been wont to regard her beautiful eyes which mirrored her every emotion as her greatest charm—to-night he thought quite differently. It was to be hoped, he said to himself, that she would learn to control them a little better before she went into society.

When the ladies were gone, Cis showed every disposition to make himself agreeable to his host and Belhaven responded in a friendly enough spirit. He wanted to keep his guest from the drawing-room as long as possible, and Cis, in whose opinion

a good bottle of claret and a cigar balanced very evenly with the society of a pretty woman, was in no hurry to move. Besides, he was keenly alive to the importance of being on good terms with the husband of a woman whom you admire, and he did admire Dorothea amazingly. Cilla he merely regarded as a bright sort of child, different from the ordinary genus of girl, with whom, if nothing else were by, it might be amusing to play at love-making, but he had no palate for such green fruit. Between the charms of the sisters, he would no more hesitate than between a ripe peach and a green plum, and then Dorothea had what to men of Cis Deerbrook's stamp is "the married woman's greatest charm—a husband." Let not the reader, however, prepare to be shocked or to suspect villanous designs in the easy-going breast of Cis; he liked to say pretty things to pretty women; if matters ever went beyond these harmless whisperings, Cis always swore it was the woman's doing. And no doubt it was. Since Adam first threw the blame on Eve, his sons have always followed suit in their treatment of her daughters.

Pretty, placid Dorothea, hearing the deep-toned clock chime ten, roused herself and said with more petulance than it was her habit to use,

"It's too bad of Bel to keep him all this time. Of course he is doing it on purpose."

Cilla had been vainly trying to fix her wandering thoughts on her book, but she was in a state of nervous excitement, listening keenly for every sound and looking every moment at the laggard hand of the clock. Dorothea had scarcely spoken, however, when manly voices and steps were heard approaching and the two gentlemen came in.

Cis took up his position close to his hostess, and, seeing this, Belhaven rang the bell and ordered the whist-table to be set.

"It's too late for whist to-night," said Dorothea, glancing at the clock. She infinitely preferred talking to Cis to puzzling her pretty head over stupid cards, which she merely regarded as a *pis-aller*.

"There's plenty of time for a game and we are not tied to time," responded his lordship resolutely.

"I don't suppose it will amuse Mr. Deerbrook to play for our ridiculous little stakes," remarked Dorothea, making another effort.

"I will play him for what he likes," said Belhaven shortly.

Cis would far rather have sat and whispered into her ladyship's pretty little ear, but he hated anything disagreeable and never irritated a husband if he could help it. So he declared, in

his pleasant voice, that he would be delighted to play for six-pences, or sugar-plums, or love, or anything they liked, and laughed at the idea that he could not play without the excitement of gambling.

Whilst the table was being set, Dorothea took the opportunity of whispering to him,

"Don't be inveigled into shooting to-morrow. There's nothing to shoot, and I will drive you out and show you the place."

So Cis was content to bide his time, and made himself equally agreeable all round and refrained from exhibiting any particular attention to Lady Belhaven.

The husband was extremely relieved in his mind; things had passed off better than he had anticipated; no serious cause for jealousy had been given him, and he had made arrangements for the morrow by which Cis would have but little opportunity of enjoying the society of the ladies.

It is, however, as unwise to reckon without your guest as without your host, and when you have to take a lady's wishes into account as well, it is wiser not to reckon at all.

My lord and my lady had each formed a separate scheme for Mr. Deerbrook's amusement and

each had been careful not to take the other into confidence.

Her ladyship had told Cis that breakfast would be at ten o'clock. Belhaven said as he wished him good night, "Breakfast at nine-thirty, sharp."

When his lordship entered the dining-room next morning punctually at the half-hour, he found only Cilla there and no signs of breakfast except the paraphernalia.

He rang the bell sharply and asked why it was not ready.

Her ladyship had ordered breakfast to be at ten o'clock, the butler replied.

Oh! and his lordship pulled a very long face. He could not break out into a rage and say no one there had any right to give orders but himself because he was a newly-married man and had a certain respect for the decencies of life.

"Did you know of this change in the time?" he asked Cilla when the butler had retired.

"No," answered Cilla.

Belhaven ran upstairs to his wife's room two stairs at a time. He did not mean to be angry—he was only going to ask her quite pleasantly to let him know another time when she gave orders counter to his.

But when he entered and found Dorothea seated

in front of the glass whilst her maid piled up delicious little gold curls on the top of her head, and when he furthermore saw the most exquisite white silk and lace tea-gown spread over a chair evidently laid out for immediate use, his unfortunate temper came into play: the Turk cropped up again.

For Dorothea never appeared at breakfast, though he had frequently remonstrated with her on the subject and had even entreated her to grace the board with her lovely presence.

It made the day so long, she objected, if one appeared before eleven.

"Are you coming down?" he said, eminently displeased that she should have chosen this morning of all others to conform to his wishes. And, when he was displeased, his face and voice were always in harmony with his feelings.

"Yes," replied his wife sweetly. "Is it not good of me?"

"I wish," he remarked coldly, not wanting to betray himself before the maid, "that when you alter *my* arrangements you would be good enough to let me know."

"But, my dearest love," said Dorothea sweetly (she had an exasperating way of using endearments when she did not mean them and he was not in the humour for them), "you can't expect other

people to breakfast at your inhuman hour. I daresay poor Mr. Deerbrook thinks it a great hardship having to be down at ten."

To avoid getting any angrier than he already is, Belhaven makes a hasty exit. He slowly descends the stairs with a swelling heart. She would not go down to breakfast to please him, but the moment another man comes along, she not only makes her appearance, but gets up half an hour earlier to bedizen herself out for his conquest.

"What fools men are to marry!" groans Belhaven to himself, as most husbands have groaned at some time or another. "You deprive yourself of liberty and everything you value to make a woman yours, and when you have done it, she is more anybody else's than yours, in heart and inclination, at all events."

At five minutes past ten, when Belhaven has sulkily insisted on Cilla's pouring out his tea and beginning breakfast, Lady Belhaven and Cis come in together, having met on the stairs. Dorothea looks simply lovely, and Cis, like most Englishmen, is always at his best when he comes down in the morning. His attire does not betray the smallest indication of any thought of sport, and this gives further cause for dissatisfaction and uneasiness to his host.

"We start at half-past ten," he says, after the curt interchange of good mornings.

Cis gives a glance at Dorothea, who straightway answers for him.

"Oh, Mr. Deerbrook is not going to shoot. I have promised to drive him round the place this morning. Besides, he is spoiled for your shooting after Mr. Vereker's."

Belhaven is literally dumb-foundered at this daring stroke. He had cut and dried his plans so nicely for carrying Lovelace off, and some one else had been cutting and drying plans before him.

The morsel he is in the act of swallowing all but chokes him. Then, trying to stifle his rage, he says, looking at Cis,

"I can give you a pretty good day's sport. I hope you'll come."

"A thousand thanks," Cis answers in his cheeriest voice, with his pleasantest smile, "but I think I'll ask you to let me off, if you don't mind. My foot isn't quite right yet and I shall have two rather hard days' walking Friday and Saturday."

Belhaven is unable to utter a word. Cilla, who can read him like a book, is positively frightened; she feels very angry with her sister, but perhaps that is not quite all on Bel's account. Her thoughts, however, are soon distracted by Cis who devotes himself entirely to her as long as Belhaven remains in the room, and she forgets to be angry with

her sister or to sympathise with Bel when Mr. Deerbrook's handsome blue eyes are gazing into hers.

"I am going to ask you to sing to me after breakfast," he says. "I adore music and I am told you have the most charming voice in the world."

Cilla's blush and her expressive eyes betray her pleasure. Belhaven, happening to look up at the moment, receives the last feather to his load of jealous anger, and, rising abruptly, quits the room. He is in a state of intense irritation; he hardly knows how to control himself. At one moment he is minded to go to the stables and forbid the cobs to be taken out; the next he thinks seriously of interviewing his wife and telling her to choose between himself and Cis. Then he tells himself that such conduct would only beseem a fool or a madman, and, finally, he goes out shooting alone with a heart full of rage and misery and a host of mocking little demons sticking darts into his brain.

Meantime it is Cilla's hour. She is wildly, dangerously happy in the presence of Cis whom Dorothea has given up to her for the present. Cis is fond of music and has bethought him of that good turn he promised to do Angie; and as it is never the least effort to him to make love to anything that wears a petticoat, if a reasonably pretty face surmounts it, he is charming away poor Cilla's

senses, and, without any really harmful intention, making a havoc in her heart that he will never be able to repair.

She sings divinely. With such a voice and such eyes, Cis is bound to confess it is not surprising that Duke or any man should be captivated. For his own part, he finds the sleek, smooth beauty of her sister more attractive: according to his experience, when women have eyes like Cilla's there is generally a devil lurking behind them, and no doubt that heaven-sweet voice could quiver with rage as well as pathos. Cis abhors emotional women —they always give a man trouble in the long run, and he hates trouble, and indeed everything that is disagreeable. But as long as the voice is tender and sympathetic, it is charming, and for the present the eyes are neither those of a devil nor an angel, but something better still, of a woman in whom love is dawning.

Cis not being given to strong feelings, and never having suffered much for love's sake, does not pause to reflect that there is any cruelty in taking this young girl's heart by the easy assault of a few long looks and a few low-voiced words of praise and admiration.

The cobs are ordered for twelve o'clock and Dorothea has gone to equip herself.

"I should like to stop and listen to your lovely

voice for ever," murmurs Cis, and poor, ingenuous, ignorant little Cilla fancies that he means it and that he is deploring having to leave her to drive with Dorothea. "Sing me this before I go," he says, stretching out his hand to take a song from the music-stand, and, whether by chance or accident, it touches hers, and an electric thrill strikes to her heart. Oh! how different a feeling from that of fear and repulsion Duke's touch had given her! She blushes crimson, and, taking the song, hastily places it on the desk, but her voice trembles so that she can scarcely sing the first notes.

"A dangerous young lady," soliloquises Cis. "Much too inflammable. But, by Jove! what a fetching voice! Poor Duke!"

When Lady Belhaven and Cis start for their drive, Cilla watches them from the window. She stands there long after they have gone, vaguely sad and half indignant. What business has Dorothea, a married woman, to flirt—yes, it is flirting!—with another man? Poor Bel! how can he bear it? the girl wonders. How utterly wretched he must be! It is very wicked of her sister! And Mr. Deerbrook, does he not know that it is wrong too? But how could he refuse to go with his hostess, even though he would rather have stayed and listened to her songs.

Then Cilla, feeling a paw on her arm and seeing two wistful brown eyes looking up in her face, is

reminded that the pug would like his usual morning walk. So she gets her hat in obedience to his suggestion, and, absorbed in thought, strolls down the drive to the high-road.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was half-past two before Dorothea pulled her cobs up in front of the old oak door of Red Meade. For the last three-quarters of an hour (and it seemed twice as long to the watcher) Cilla had stood at the window of the morning-room waiting for the return of her sister and Mr. Deerbrook. Her heart had been torn with alternate jealousy and anxiety. Dorothea never stayed out later than two—she always wanted her luncheon. Cilla herself was too miserable to be hungry.

The pair arrived home in the highest spirits, laughing and chatting; Cilla's jealous eyes remarked that Dorothea gave both her hands to Cis in getting out.

"Lunch at once," Lady Belhaven cried to the butler, and then she came laughing in and Cilla thought it was very heartless of her to be so gay, and their mother dead only such a little while ago.

Dorothea had ordered that the luncheon should be more than usually choice and had intimated that she might be rather late in returning. She and

Cis had both something of the gourmet about them. Nice people always have, Dorothea asserted.

They had enjoyed their drive immensely; it was so delightful to my lady after her long seclusion once more to hear and to talk that delightful society jargon which is a special language to the initiated. She and Cis were in admirable *rapport* which the well-chosen lunch contributed to heighten. Her ladyship had ordered champagne because Cis always drank it and she was rather by way of liking it herself. They were so engrossed with each other that they forgot all about Cilla, and she sat there pale, wretched, unable to eat because of a terrible choking sensation in her throat; her poor little heart swelling with jealousy, anger, and misery.

She thought the other two would never leave off eating; when lunch ought to have been over, there was still *foie gras* and *caviare* to be dallied with, then liqueurs, and after this, was it possible! cake and grapes. And then, crowning infamy! Dorothea begged Cis to light his cigarette, and he at once joyfully obeyed.

Cilla did not know that it was the custom of fashionable men to smoke after luncheon in the presence of fashionable ladies; Belhaven never smoked in the dining-room when they were there—it seemed an unpardonable familiarity in the girl's eyes. She did not pause to analyse her feelings nor to reflect

that her anger was on Dorothea's account. Cis exercised such a spell over her sensitive, passionate young heart that it is probable if he had appealed to her and pressed her to smoke a cigarette herself to please him she would have consented. But neither of them took the smallest notice of her; they were entirely engrossed with each other, and, when Cis lighted his cigarette, she rose to leave the table. He went and opened the door for her with joyful alacrity, and poor Cilla read but too accurately the expression of his face.

"There is no doubt," he said, returning to his chair and drawing it a couple of feet nearer to that of his hostess, "that two is a better number than three."

"Yes," responded Dorothea heartily. "And girls are such a bore. One can never talk before them."

And then they laugh and chat on, and Cis tells her a thousand amusing little stories and *chroniques scandaleuses* which no one can tell so well nor so delicately as himself. A word, a pause, a gesture, and he can convey everything he desires without shocking the most delicately-balanced susceptibilities.

Lady Belhaven has not been so happy nor so much amused since she married; time flies without either remarking it; four o'clock strikes—still they sit on in the dining-room and Cis has reached his third cigarette.

The butler comes in and puts on fresh logs, and a great blaze roars up the chimney. This, as it happens, is unfortunate. It has grown nearly dark outside, and, at this moment, Belhaven passes the window on his return from his day's shooting. The long walk has done him good; has braced his nerves and toned down his anger. He has told himself that he must not be unreasonable; that he must be content to pay the penalty attached to having a beautiful wife. Of course other men will admire her, and, of course, being a woman, she will love admiration and court it. That weakness is the peculiarity of the sex and order to which she belongs. He will make a supreme effort to conquer his sullenness and meet them all with a cheerful countenance and as pleasant a voice as he can command. He is smoothing his brow at the moment of passing the dining-room window, when lo! a vision meets his gaze that sends his resolutions to the winds and fills him with a fury to which the morning's anger had been mere child's play.

It was an interior that a painter would have looked at with delight—the firelight throwing a ruddy glow over the draperies, the pictures on the wall, the silver and glass, the fruit and flowers. Belhaven saw none of these. What he did see was Cis with one elbow on the table sitting familiarly near to his wife; looking into her face and *smoking!* a champagne bottle at his elbow.

This accursed saturnalia was being held under his roof: his bride of five months was behaving with this unbridled licence, apparently forgetful of his very existence.

He turned away and went into the gun-room in a state bordering on frenzy that was presently succeeded by a sort of stupor. He sat on there in the dark for perhaps an hour—then the door opened and Dorothea's gay voice called,

"Bel! Bel! where are you?"

He held his breath and did not answer. He could have struck her or strangled her, but he could not speak to her in an ordinary voice.

"I wonder where he is," she said, and then went away and shut the door.

She had inquired of the servants when they brought in tea and had ascertained that his lordship had come in, and, feeling rather guilty in her conscience, had been to look for him with the intention of behaving with great wifely tenderness and solicitude towards him. Not finding him in the gun-room, she went to the library and thence to his dressing-room.

Meeting Cilla on the stairs she asked where Bel was and Cilla answered coldly that she had not seen him. Dorothea, not generally very acute in her perceptions, noticed that there was something unusual in her sister's voice.

"Go and pour out the tea, dear," she said sweetly.

"I don't suppose I am wanted," replied the girl in a tone of intense bitterness.

Dorothea looked at her with a petrified stare. Then she said, in a displeased voice,

"Are you out of your senses! Please do as I ask you at once!"

Cilla felt the strongest inclination to rebel, but she could not resist the fascination of being in Mr. Deerbrook's presence. So she obeyed.

Cis greeted her with his most charming smile. He saw that she was angry and hurt, and, as he hated anything unpleasant, he exerted himself to soothe her ruffled feelings.

"Why did you run away and where have you been all this long time?" he said, and poor Cilla, who was like clay in his hands, seeing the soft expression of his deep-coloured eyes and hearing the tender inflexion of his voice, was beguiled in a moment from her anger and felt, instead, a glow of rapture thrill through her heart.

When Dorothea came back after her fruitless search and they had finished tea, she proposed an adjournment to the billiard-room from which she sent a message to her husband requesting him to join them there.

But, though she sent a second time, Belhaven came not, and Dorothea felt an uneasy conviction that he was still angry with her for taking Cis driving. She little guessed how his wrath had been augmented by later events. Cis, to whom jealous husbands were not an unknown genus, had a pretty shrewd idea that something was wrong and began to devote himself to Cilla, so that when Belhaven should appear it might not seem to the girl or to him as a *rôle* suddenly assumed, and Dorothea, quite understanding his motive, neither showed nor felt any displeasure at the transfer of his attentions. She was rather absorbed too with meditations how to appease Bel's wrath.

When she went upstairs to dress for dinner she again paid a visit to his dressing-room, and this time she found her lord. Instead of advancing eagerly to embrace her as was his custom; he stared coldly at her as though he would ask the reason of her intrusion.

"Where have you been?" she cried gaily, though her heart quaked a little. "I sent for you twice."

He did not so much as answer her. Indeed he could not, for a terrible fear seized him lest if he once opened his lips it would be like unbarring the flood-gates.

"What is the matter? Are you cross with me?"

she said coaxingly, and, going up to him, she laid a hand on his arm. He shook her off as if she had been a serpent.

"Please go," he uttered in a smothered voice, and pointed towards the door.

"Oh, very well," returned Dorothea, nettled at such treatment, and, with that, she left him. What did she care, she said to herself with a toss of her head. If he chose to put himself in a temper for nothing, he must do it. She certainly would not crouch to him like a whipped spaniel nor let him think she was afraid of him. This was their first struggle; this, then, was the time to show her independence. So, during dinner, she made herself more charming than ever to Cis, who, for his own part, wished devoutly that women had a little more discretion and would not run such silly risks when there was nothing on earth to be gained by them. It was like burning your house over your head for the fun of making a blaze, but most women were like that, he reflected. He devoted himself chiefly to Cilla at dinner, but Belhaven, sitting morose and glum, saw through this manœuvre or thought he did. He saw, moreover, that Cis, in his indolent vanity, was turning the poor child's head. And now for the first time he repented him sorely of having put a spoke in Duke's wheel and realised that the Scylla from which he had thought to save her was as nothing compared with the Charybdis

into which she might fall. Cis meant nothing. God forbid that he should! What could he bring to a girl like Cilla but heart-burning and misery? Duke, by comparison, was a rock to lean upon, and Cis like shifting sands. Belhaven, a prey to regret and assailed by miserable thoughts, could scarcely eat his dinner. Cis found him very poor company after the ladies had gone although he made supreme efforts to get him to talk. It was not long before they adjourned to the drawing-room.

"Shall we have our game of whist?" inquired Dorothea, all the more sweet and smiling to make up for her husband's lowering brows.

"No," replied Belhaven curtly. "I don't care to play."

No matter what she had proposed, he would have negatived it to-night, angry and embittered as he was against her.

"Then," said her ladyship, turning to Cis, "you and I will play écarté. I adore écarté. I like it far better than whist. And," with an expression of childish glee, "we will have a little gamble. Ring the bell, please." When the servant came she bade him ask her maid for her purse.

Belhaven disapproved of women gambling, and when he saw the pair sit down to play, he experienced a horrible conviction that he had been fulfilling the vulgar old proverb, and cutting off his nose to spite his face.

For some minutes he stood, as his habit was when vexed, staring into the fire; then he turned and glanced at Cilla. She had taken up a book and was pretending to read—her face was hidden behind it, but he could see that the hands which held it trembled. Then he glanced at the two handsome, smiling people sitting opposite to each other and cursed them for their heartless vanity and selfishness, which made them callous to the pain they were inflicting. He did not add any anathema upon his own folly and Cilla's for nursing this jealous anguish, as he might have done with very good reason.

Presently he approached his sister-in-law and proposed a game of chess—it was a favourite amusement with both. She acquiesced and he fetched the board and set the men. But before five minutes had elapsed both would have been devoutly thankful to throw up the game.

Everyone knows that chess requires the exercise of all the intelligence that the player possesses, a cool head and an attentive mind. As, however, the hearts of these two poor people were rent with jealousy; as they could not keep their eyes from occasional glances at the other pair nor their ears from straining to catch what the écarté players were saying, the result was that each made the most unskilful and ill-considered moves, whilst the other,

even if he remarked it, did not care to set his adversary right.

Cilla, with trembling hands, marble feet, and a little red patch on either white cheek, was wondering dumbly how Belhaven could allow her sister to behave in this manner. She half dreaded, half longed for him to make a scene and punish the wicked offender on the spot. And Belhaven, over and above his own wrath and pain, was stricken with regret and perplexity as he looked at the child's white face; the hunted expression of her eyes, her parched and burning lips.

"What was to become of her if she was made of such inflammable stuff as this?"

He wished that he had not taken compassion on her and rescued her from her governess; that he had let Duke make his declaration (how he would open his arms to Duke as a suitor now!), that—but here Dorothea's *rire perlé* fell upon his ear, and, involuntarily, he glanced at her. Her beautiful bare white arms were on the table, her jewelled fingers supported her dimpled chin; she was looking over at Cis, who bent slightly towards her, with an expression of provoking coquetry in her blue eyes. Belhaven rose abruptly and left the room. Cilla, after one frightened movement, resumed her book and hid her face behind it. She did not even remark that she was holding it upside down. Her

heart was full of hatred and bitterness. For several months no angry emotion had ruffled her breast, but now the demon of rage and anger that had possessed her in the Fräulein's days seemed to have returned, bringing with him seven spirits worse than himself. To-night she felt that she hated her sister far more than she had ever hated her governess, and, because she had right principles and a good heart, she was shocked and horrified at herself and the terrible feelings which had gained the mastery over her.

Dorothea was enjoying a delightful evening—she had almost forgotten the existence of the other pair—she was glad when Belhaven took himself off and that he forbore to return. But retribution was in store for her.

I will not presume to enter the marital chamber nor to describe the terrible scene which took place there on that December midnight. Belhaven did not smother his Desdemona, though the snowy, lace-fringed pillows were conveniently and invitingly handy, but he exhibited such passion and said such dreadful things that his bride was terribly frightened and remained sobbing and hysterical for quite half an hour after he left her. As for Belhaven, his heart was a literal hell of conflicting passions. He was enraged against Dorothea: he cursed his own brutality: at one moment he hated her almost to madness; at the next he would fain have grovelled at

her feet and besought her forgiveness. Now she was a Lamia, a serpent, a she-devil; again he only remembered that she was an exquisitely beautiful woman whom he agonised to clasp to his breast and cover with a torrent of kisses. He went through all the phases of that worst madness, jealousy; the hate, love, loathing, passion which are its alternate stages. When his fury had expended itself, heart-hunger came in its place; although he knew that his anger had been just if excessive, he was ready to fall at her feet and declare himself a brute, a wretch, a monster and to implore her forgiveness in the most abject terms. Only once more to fold her beautiful form in his arms, to press his lips to her fair beloved face; the desire became a madness. Softly and stealthily he crept from his room in the darkness and tried the handle of his wife's door. But her ladyship had already taken one step towards revenge and had locked herself in.

"Dorothea!" he murmured softly. "Dorothea! My own darling!"

But whether Dorothea heard him or not, I know not; no answer came to his appeal, no sound from within fell upon his keenly listening ear. Then his love turned to wrath again; he went back to his own room and spent the night watches in weary pacings to and fro in company with his miserable reflections. What a terrible future awaited him if already in the first blush of their married life his wife evinced such

pleasure in the society of another man; acted with such indiscretion before her servants!

Poor little Cilla in her dainty pink-hung chamber was spending as miserable a night as her brother-in-law.

People may laugh at the suffering and the passion of a love-sick girl not yet seventeen, but indeed it is no laughing matter. Pshaw! to fall in love at first sight with a man who has given her no encouragement to speak of. If she is distraught with grief and passion, she must be a shameless, immodest creature with an ill-regulated, not to say depraved, mind. But the passion of a young girl of Cilla's temperament is as pure and innocent as it is violent: its food is a look, a hand-pressure; a tender word, a flower for a keep-sake. If anyone disputes or jeers at this absolute truth, it is because of the coarseness of his own mind. And it is a fact, unrecognised though it may be, that the love of women in general is far more sentimental and sympathy-craving than sensual.

All through her short life, Cilla had been yearning for love—in default of it, she had fed her heart and imagination with romances and had lived amongst ideal heroes and ideal passions. She was budding into womanhood; she had never until the last few months heard a word of love uttered nor seen passion in a man's eyes—her heart was open to receive

the first master who should touch and please it. And what kind of man was likely to attract a girl whose ideas had been moulded from the heroes of novels and romances? Was it a man blunt, straightforward, matter of fact such as Duke, or a man of remarkably handsome exterior like Cis, versed in all the arts of pleasing women; whose look was a caress, whose voice was a harmony. And Cis had taken captive many quite experienced feminine hearts whilst poor little Cilla was not even yet at her ABC of knowledge of the world and of the ways of men. And do not people invariably in books fall in love at first sight?—and sometimes out of them too?

The cause of all these terribly heartburnings at Red Meade slept peacefully and dreamlessly from the moment he put his head on the pillow until his servant called him next morning; and descended as cheery, *débonnair* and smiling to breakfast as was his wont. He could not fail to remark the paleness both of Belhaven and Cilla, and when he found that his hostess was not coming down to breakfast surmised that there had been "the devil to pay." He was going at half-past eleven, a circumstance for which he was cheerfully thankful—he hated rows.

Belhaven, feeling a little ashamed of himself as people who have hasty tempers and give way to them invariably do, even though they do not confess

it, exerted himself to be civil and to talk to the "parting guest" whom he was about so joyfully to "speed," and Cis seconded him with perfect good humour. He begged Cilla to let him hear her lovely voice again before he went.

In the three quarters of an hour that the two spent alone together, he contrived to make Cilla forget that he had flirted with Dorothea and to inspire the belief in her foolish heart that he was very seriously attracted towards herself. If the poor child's vanity comes in for censure, it must be remembered that she had already made the indisputable conquest of so important a personage as Mr. Vereker and had thus been inspired with some little confidence in her powers of pleasing.

"I shall look forward ever so to meeting you in town," Cis says with a melting glance from his dark blue eyes, and holds her hand twice as long as he need. "I shall send you those songs I spoke of the moment I get to London. Think of me when you sing them, will you?"

"Time to be off," cries Belhaven, putting his head in at the door, and with one last look and pressure and an answering look from Cilla's beautiful eyes that shamelessly betray her heart's sweet secret, Cis is gone.

And the girl with radiant eyes and a faint flush like the colour in the heart of a shell on her cream-

white cheeks throws herself into the big chair by the fire and forgets the world and time and space in the most heavenly day-dream that has ever visited her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I CAN'T keep away any longer," said Duke on the afternoon of the day on which Mr. Deerbrook left Red Meade. "I must go and see my little girl."

He had sought Angie in her boudoir and was pacing up and down the room in a restless, feverish mood.

"Why not?" she answered tranquilly. "There is nothing to keep you here to-morrow."

"I think I will go," he said. "Only Bel always makes it so infernally unpleasant for me and looks as if I had no business there. It's awfully disagreeable going anywhere that you feel you are not welcome."

"But if Miss St. George is pleased to see you, is not that enough?"

"Ah!" said Duke. And then he took two or three turns in silence, wondering whether Cilla would be pleased to see him. "If I knew," he went on, wistfully, looking to Angie for comfort. "*If I knew* that she cared for me, I shouldn't mind two straws whether Bel was pleased or not. What do you think

now? Would she," diffidently, "have given you at all the idea that she cared for me, just the least little bit?"

He put the question in as pleading a tone as though he were asking for a portion of Angie's favour.

"I told you, my dear," she answered, "I did not look at you. I always think it indiscreet to watch lovers" (with a little, bitter intonation on the last word).

Duke caught it. He was more sensitive now that he was so much in love.

"You know," he said, stopping before her and speaking almost apologetically. "You know how devoted I was to you—you know if I could have married you years ago, how gladly I would have done it. I should never have thought of another woman nor looked at one if you had been my wife, but a fellow can't go on for ever without caring for some one who can be something to him in return."

"My dear boy," said Angie with some coldness, "why do you talk in that way? Have I given you any reason to think I am jealous?"

She opened her large dark eyes and fixed them on his face.

"No, no, of course not," he cried, disconcerted and confused. "I was only saying what was a fact. I did care awfully for you. I would have given my soul for you once."

"Well," she answered with a hard little laugh, "let us be thankful that your soul is no longer in peril; at all events on my account. Good Heavens!" with latent irritation: "to hear the generous way in which men talk of giving their souls—that means eternity—when they cannot devote their bodies for more than a few months at a time!"

"Can they not?" cried Duke. "I swear—"

"Do not swear!" and Angie changed her mood and laughed. "It is not worth while. We were talking about your going to Red Meade. I will amuse your party—if it is fine and bright like to-day, we might drive over to the White House, take our lunch with us and get back before dark."

"What an angel you are!" cried Duke, with the fervour that a man feels for a woman when she does what he wants, and makes things smooth for him.

So the next day saw Mr. Vereker *en route* for Red Meade—he always drove the fastest horse in his stables when he went in that direction.

It was with an emotion quite apart from pleasure that, as he turned into the gates, he saw Belhaven coming down the drive with his gun over his shoulder.

"If I had been five minutes later!" he thought, and then pulled up to greet his, as he imagined, reluctant host.

But on this occasion, Belhaven, instead of giving him a cold greeting, was almost cordial.

"I'll walk back to the house with you if you'll get out," he said, and Duke gave the reins to the groom and jumped down.

There was rather an awkward pause for a moment after the man had driven off. Duke was wondering at this unexpected cordiality and Belhaven was trying to make up his mind whether to speak about Cilla or not. He had thought a great deal about her this morning, for there had been a grand reconciliation between him and Dorothea, after which he had forgotten his own pangs and grievances and found himself at liberty to think of other subjects. He was very much puzzled about Cilla and what to do with her; he had a vague idea that the only way to make her heart safe was to tie it up to something strong as you would chain up a dangerous dog. He forgot his former sensible theories about her—his one idea was to keep her from making a goose of herself about Cis. Now the safest plan, though it is not always infallible, is to put yourself in the place of the person for whom you wish to act. If Belhaven had only said to himself, "Suppose I were offered all the most beautiful women in the world instead of Dorothea, would I hesitate for a moment between her and them?" But he was foolish enough to think it quite possible that Cilla being "only a child who did not know her own mind," might be able to satisfy herself with Duke in default of Cis. He did not know how far more

abhorrent to a young girl is the thought of any other man as a lover than the one whom her fancy has lighted on than it could possibly be to him—at all events there was a chance, he said to himself. If Duke made love to her, she might look upon him in a new light. Belhaven was of course ignorant of Duke's attempt and its disastrous failure. After a moment of doubt he rushed at his subject.

"My dear old chap," he said, turning with considerable cordiality to Duke, "I've been thinking a good deal about you and Cilla, and, do you know, I am not sure that I was right after all in placing restrictions upon you."

Duke's every pulse throbbed with a great and sudden joy. "Of course," Belhaven continued, seeing the light that leaped to Duke's eyes, "I still stick to what I said about marriage being out of the question for a long time to come, but I do not think there could be any great harm in your speaking to her."

Duke grasped his hand—he could hardly speak for the strength of his emotions. A sudden joyful thought smote him that Belhaven had discovered that Cilla cared for him—he could not rest until he made it a certainty.

"What has made you change your mind?" he cried eagerly turning to look into his friend's face.

Then it occurred to Belhaven that it would be just as well to put Duke on his guard.

"Well, you see," he answered not without hesitation, "she is such a child—she knows nothing of the world—she is almost in the power of—of any man who chose to make a fool of her." Then, as he sees Duke's astonished face, he hastens to add, "You know, Cis Deerbrook has been over here, making love to her and——"

Duke turned very white.

"That was a blackguard trick of his when he knew I loved her," he said. "Why I thought——"

He recollected himself and paused.

"It was your wife he was after," he had been going to say, but Belhaven knew just as well as though the words had been spoken.

"I don't mean to say," he answered, "that he told her he loved her in so many words, but you know that d—nable way of his that he can't be five minutes with a woman without making her think he's in love with her. Not that I know," proceeded Belhaven hastily, "that she thinks anything about him. I don't understand girls; I never had anything to do with one before. But I know she has high principles and I think that if you could only get her to give you a promise——"

Belhaven hesitated. Even as he spoke, it flashed across him that the advice he was giving

Duke was unsound and that this hasty and ill-considered measure stood a very poor chance of success. But, at this moment, Cilla appeared in the distance with her pug trotting beside her.

"Here she is," said Belhaven. "We will turn and walk with her. When we get into the wood, I will leave you two together, and, in an hour's time, I shall be back in my room in case you have anything to tell me."

Cilla smiled frankly at Duke and gave him her hand. The sight of him excited no feeling of any sort in her breast; her thoughts being quite full of Cis, she did not trouble her head about any other man. And as Belhaven had arranged that Mr. Vereker was not to pay her any lover-like attentions, she felt quite secure and unembarrassed. Had she been less pre-occupied, she might have remarked how nervous and ill at ease Duke seemed, and that most of the conversation fell to herself and her brother-in-law.

They arrived at the wood, and, presently, when they reached a place where a narrow path led off, Belhaven said,

"I'll leave you here. I think I shall get a couple of hares. See you at lunch," and he was off.

Duke and Cilla pursued their way; Cilla talking with tolerable unconcern, Duke with a knot in his throat and an unusual trembling of his strong hands.

This pale, dark-eyed young girl made him feel like a schoolboy; but then on her fiat there lay so much joy or misery.

"Won't you rest here a moment?" he said suddenly as they came to a wooden bench, and there was something so strange in his voice that Cilla looked up quickly.

With that swift glance a sudden intuition came to her of what was going to happen, and she shut up her heart against him with the cold and bitter feeling that even the softest-hearted women have for a man who makes love to them against their will when they care for another.

"No," she said coldly. "I am not tired; I would rather walk."

Duke stopped dead short.

"I want to speak to you. I have something to say to you," he uttered in a quick, nervous tone.

"Do not say it," she said, her heart standing still, and she hurried on. With a couple of strides he overtook her.

"Why do you run away from me?" he cried. "I must speak. Won't you listen to me?"

"No, no," she answered, and the swift colour rushed to her face.

"You must and shall hear me," cried poor Duke quite beside himself. "If you only knew how I love you!"

Cilla, tender-hearted as she was, was not a bit sorry for him. Women, as far as I know, never have any compassion as long as the unwelcome suitor is in their presence.

"I do not want to know," she returned almost impatiently. "I cannot help it. I am very sorry."

"Do you hate me then?" he said in a melancholy voice, incapable of understanding anything but extremes at this moment.

"Hate you!" echoed Cilla. "No, certainly not. I like you very much." But her tone did not convey the idea of any great partiality.

"I don't want you to *like* me," he said miserably. "*Like* is a poor, wretched word. You may *like* anybody and everybody. What I want is your love."

"It is no use," said Cilla desperately. "I told you not to speak to me. I cannot love you. I know I never should."

"Why!" asked Duke. And then a bitter rankling thought of Cis and his treachery came into his heart and he said,

"Is it because you care for some one else? is it because Deerbrook, my own friend, who knew that I loved you, has been trying to get you away from me?"

A flood of crimson rushed to Cilla's brow and throat. She had imagined her secret was all her

own—she was ready to die of shame at the thought that she was discovered. Then her shame turned to bitterest resentment.

"I do not understand you," she cried with a look in her eyes that would have given an impartial observer the notion that she had a pretty temper of her own. "Do you mean to insult me? Is that what you came for?"

Duke ought to have taken warning, but he was so wretched he grew reckless.

"You don't know Cis," he said rashly, "he is like that with every woman—he has no more idea of marrying you than of flying—he could not even if he wanted to—he is head over ears in debt."

Tears came into Cilla's eyes, but they were not tears of grief but rage—she could not even find words to vent her wrath.

"Whilst I," proceeded Duke, rushing on his destruction, "love you with all my soul. All that I have is yours. I can give you everything your heart could want."

Then the tender-hearted and sympathetic Cilla found her tongue.

"Do you think," she cried, glaring upon him like a young pythoness, "that I care for your money? I suppose you fancy you can *buy* anybody. But," with superb scorn, "if you had fifty times as much it would be all the same to me. I would not marry you."

After this, one might have thought there was not much more for Duke to say. But he had the true British courage that never knows when it is beaten.

"Don't say that for God's sake!" he entreated. "Let me hope. If you don't love me now, perhaps some day when you see how faithful and devoted I am" (here Cilla was momentarily softened, but unluckily he continued): "when you have found out that Cis is only playing with you, you may come to care for me."

"Never!" cried the girl with vindictive energy —"never." Then she stopped dead short. "Which way are you going?" she said, "because I will go the other. I hope I shall never see you again. If you are a gentleman, you will not attempt to come near me ever again."

Then Duke realised that he had got his *congé*. He stared at her in a sort of dazed, broken-hearted way, and then stood still whilst she walked away with her head in the air and the pug, his gift, trotting gaily at her heels. He went and leaned with his back against a tree. The winter sun was shining through the branches on the dead leaves, dead as his hopes; but everything looked ashen grey to him; a deathly cold seemed to have nipped his heart. It crossed his mind with a bitter irony that he was the rich Mr. Vereker, the Sultan before whom so

many lovely and proud damsels had knelt, waiting for him to throw the handkerchief. And this young girl had flouted and disdained him, and laughed to scorn his riches and his gifts.

But even whilst his heart was bitter within him, he said with a chivalrous love and respect of her, "God bless her! She is not like the rest of them. She would not take me for what I have!"

Presently he heard a shot close by and then the crashing of the leaves and branches under Belhaven's retriever.

"Hullo there!" cried the master of Red Meade a moment later. "By Jove, Duke! I might have shot you!"

"I wish to God you had!" said poor Duke and then Belhaven knew what he had strongly suspected before that he had been guilty of a serious error of judgment.

"Don't take it to heart!" he said cheerily laying a kind hand on the other's shoulder. It is so easy to look on the bright side of our friends' misfortunes. "She's only a child. There's plenty of time for her to change her mind."

"Why did you ask Cis over?" cried Duke reproachfully. "You might have known."

Belhaven did not answer his remark. He could not bear to confess that Dorothea had given the invitation without consulting him.

"Did Cilla say she cared for him?" he asked.

"No," Duke answered. "But she was furious with me for saying that he meant nothing."

"It was a pity you brought his name in," said Belhaven, knitting his brows.

"Yes," agreed Duke dolefully, "it was. She left me in a rage. I am never to see nor speak to her again."

"Oh!" said Belhaven authoritatively, "that is humbug. She'll have to see and speak to any friend of mine whom I choose to ask."

"I don't want any persecution on my account," uttered Duke mournfully. "No! I shan't trouble her any more. I wish I hadn't come to-day. Perhaps if she had had a week or two to get over thinking of him I might have had a better chance."

"Perhaps," agreed Belhaven feeling anything but pleased with his own share of the transaction. "One can only do what one thinks is for the best."

"Of course, of course," answered Duke. "You have behaved awfully well and kindly to me. I shan't forget it," and he grasped Belhaven's hand. "Well! now there is only one thing for me to do—to get away. I'll go and order my trap."

"Stop and lunch first," said his host.

Duke made a gesture as though to say he never wished to taste food again. Then the two men walked together towards the house with doleful countenances.

It was rather hard on Duke's groom that because his master's suit was unsuccessful, he should be suddenly torn from the delicious sirloin of beef of which he had only eaten two mouthfuls. But when he received the imperative message that he was wanted immediately, there was nothing for it but to obey. He couldn't see why if folks was in love they shouldn't want their victuals all the same, and as he sat sadly with folded arms beside his master in the buggy, he called to mind how the very day he discovered his Sarah embracing the footman behind the pantry-door, he made as good a dinner as ever he did in his life off a roast leg of pork.

For of course he knew that his master had been crossed in love, as masters, however unintentionally, have no secrets from their servants.

Duke wanted Angie. His first question on reaching home was whether she had returned and he was bitterly disappointed at being answered in the negative though he knew of the proposed picnic. Why were people always out of the way when you wanted them! But if Cilla had smiled upon him, he would hardly have been aware at this moment that such a person as Angie existed. He went and shut himself in his room having given orders that he was to be instantly apprised of her return. How he longed for her! How his heart smote him, now that he was suffering, for his thoughtless conduct to her. He longed for her soft sympathetic voice, for

the touch of her cool hand as a man suffering physical agony longs for an anodyne. He knew that tender heart: *she* would not triumph over him nor rejoice secretly because of his sufferings even though he had behaved selfishly to her.

END OF VOL. I.

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My Lord and my Lady

Bd.: 1

1882

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